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CORREGIDOR -- FEBRUARY 1945

A Battlebook presented to the Staff and Faculty of
the United States Army Command and General
Staff College in fulfillment of the
requirements for A660

by

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1983

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INTRODUCTION

The following document will examine World War II's second battle of CORREGIDOR, which resulted in the recapture of the island by US forces. CORREGIDOR is a rocky outcrop of land which would be totally without significance were it not for its location, guarding the entrance to Manila bay -- the largest and most important harbor in the Philippines.

This action began at 0833 on 16 February 1945 with the dropping of the first paratroopers. The island was officially secured two weeks later, on 2 March. US units involved were the 503d Regimental Combat Team, XI Corps, 6th Army; 5th Air Force; 3-34 Infantry; and USN Task Force 78. Defending the island were elements of the Bay Entrance Defense Force, an ad hoc force consisting of about 75% navy garrison troops and 25% army forces.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Colonial Empires

The chain of events which culminated in the United States facing the Empire of Japan in World War II can be traced to the late 18th Century expansion of the two antagonists into the Pacific. While other major colonial powers in the Pacific (Spain, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Holland) were well established by the mid-Nineteenth Century, both the United States and Japan were relatively late in establishing their holdings. The US annexation of Hawaii and the Phillipines in 1898 climaxed the acquisitions which began with Alaska and Midway Island in 1867 and the port of Pago Pago, Samoa, in 1877.

Japan, meanwhile, although a Pacific nation herself, was the last major power to develop an empire in the region. In the late 1870's she annexed the Kuril, Bonin, and Ryukyu Islands, followed in 1894-1895 by Formosa and the Pescadores, taken in the Sino-Japanese war. China also ceded Japan the Liaotung Peninsula in Manchuria, but Russia, France and Germany interceded to block Japanese expansion to the mainland.

The US annexation of Hawaii and the Phillippines was a stinging rebuke to Japan, following so closely her inability to enforce the provisions of her treaty with China in the face of interference by western nations. Convinced that force was now necessary to achieve her national aims, Japan began a deliberate program of military buildup.

Seeds of Conflict

In 1904, Japan launched a surprise attack against the Russian fleet at Port Arthur on the tip of the Liaotung Peninsula, seeking both revenge for her humiliation following the war with China and to establish her control of Korea. After a year of heavy fighting, with both sides ready for peace, President Theodore Roosevelt assisted in negotiating the Treaty of Portsmouth which ended the war, recognized Korea as within Japan's sphere of influence, and granted Japan Russia's lease on the Liaotung Peninsula, rail and mining privileges in southern Manchuria, and the southern half of Sakhalin Island. Then, in 1910, Japan annexed Korea and by secret agreement with Russia established southern Manchuria as within the Japanese sphere of influence.

World War I enabled Japan, by declaring war with Germany, to seize the Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands (less Guam), as well as German interests in Shantung province and the port of Tsingtao in China. The Treaty of Versailles sanctioned these Japanese gains over the objections of President Wilson, who protested that the islands' only value was military,

and that their control by Japan would make defense of the Philippines impossible. As a result, Japan held most of Micronesia, and was the dominant power in the western Pacific north of the equator.

Besides the Japanese holdings, other major powers in the area included the United States, who controlled the northeast Pacific with Alaska, Hawaii, and the Aleutians, as well as scattered outposts in Japanese controlled areas -- Guam, Wake, and the Philippines. The British were dominant in the central and southwest Pacific areas from Australia, New Guinea, Samoa, and Melanesia, while the French controlled most of the southeast Pacific with bases in French Oceania, New Caledonia, and the New Hebrides. Dutch interests were also present in the East Indies and New Guinea.

Enhancement of Japanese dominance in the region also came in the Washington Conference of 1922, in which Japan agreed to accept a 5-5-3 ratio of naval vessels (United States, Britain, Japan) in return for an agreement by the United States and Britain to maintain the status quo of their bases in the Western Pacific. This had the effect of halting any further fortification of the Philippines, Hong Kong, Guam, the Aleutians, and other US and British possessions west of Hawaii. Only the Philippines, at the conclusion of the Washington Conference, were sufficiently developed to support a naval force adequate to present a threat to Japanese dominance in the Western Pacific.

Expansion into Manchuria

Since her victory in the Russo-Japanese war, Japan had invested considerable amounts of money and troops in the development of her interests on the mainland. Under her successful operation of the railroads captured from the Russians, Manchuria became attractive to large numbers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean merchants and settlers. Japan had the right to station troops along the railroads for protection from bandits, and to engage in farming, mining, and business activities.

At the same time, Japan was feeling the squeeze of a rapidly expanding population and its effects upon the economy. Secret societies within the military called for internal reforms as well as territorial growth. A group of militaristic young officers saw Manchuria as the solution to expanding poverty in Japan. The area could not only provide badly needed farm land to relieve the pressure on the overcrowded islands, but would also supply a source of raw materials for industry and a market for manufactured items. A Japanese colony in Manchuria, however, would require seizure of the area by force from the governing Chinese war lord.

In a series of actions in what amounted to open rebellion, the officers of the secret societies took over the Kwantung Army in Manchuria and seized Mukden and much of the province by 1931. In the following years, a number of senior officers opposed to the establishment of the Japanese state of Manchukuo were assassinated by society members.

While the sort of mass disobedience to orders that resulted in the seizure of Manchuria against the wishes of Tokyo would be considered mutiny in most armies, the Japanese enjoyed a long tradition of independent action in support of the Emperor. Otherwise mutinous acts, done with the belief of the perpetrator that his actions were fully in the best interests of the Emperor, were traditionally punished very lightly, if at all. This naturally did nothing to discourage such conduct in others.

The Chinese, meanwhile, were not content with the expansionist Japanese occupying Manchuria. Fighting between Nationalists and Communists had been suspended in a somewhat uneasy truce to present a united front against the Japanese. Finally, on 7 July 1937, war broke out between China and Japan at the Marco Polo Bridge near Lukouchiao. There is even today confusion and disagreement as to who initiated the battle, as relations between Chinese and Japanese troops in the area were generally good. There is considerable basis to believe that the Chinese Communists were behind the incident in an attempt to foster conflict between the Nationalists and the Japanese: Others believe that the incident was touched off by Japanese militarist radicals.

Whatever the cause, the Marco Polo Bridge incident marked the beginning of war between China and Japan. Within six months, Japanese troops controlled most of China north of the Yellow River. Despite heavy losses, however, the Chinese army continued heavy resistance against a considerably superior force, and the Nationalist government remained a power. By 1939, Japan had been forced into a lengthy war of attrition, complicated by the demands of administering a large and hostile territory. Also in that year, Japan began the pressure on French Indochina which ultimately would bring the United States into the war.

The United States and Britain, meanwhile, had become increasingly alarmed at Japanese expansionism. Economic constraints were applied, beginning in 1938 with an embargo on the export of aircraft and related equipment from the US to Japan. Japanese response, late in 1938, was the announcement of a "Co-Prosperity Sphere" in East Asia. This attempt at hegemony was met with increased aid to the Nationalist government in China. In 1940, the 1911 Commercial treaty between the US and Japan was abrogated by the US, clearing the way for full economic sanctions. In July of that year most strategic material shipments were embargoed.

The Tripartite Pact

As a result of the war in Europe, British, French, and Dutch empires in the Pacific were becoming more and more vulnerable. Only the United States, the Japanese reasoned, were in a position to impede their expansion. Japan now sought the assistance of Germany and Italy to assist in overcoming US opposition. The Tripartite Pact, signed on 27 September 1940, was viewed by the Japanese not as an intent to go to war, but as an instrument to force

the US to forgo further support to China and to refrain from interfering with Japanese expansion to the south. US reaction was that the pact placed Japan squarely in the Axis camp, and eliminated the possibility of a diplomatic solution with Japan alone, not linked to actions in Europe.

Even though Japan was able to use German leverage on the Vichy government in France to obtain bases in French Indochina, strong anti-Japanese feeling especially in the south caused drops in exports of Indochinese rice, rubber, coal, and other strategic materials to Japan. At the same time, the US economic blockade was beginning to cause shortages. The combined result was an increased pressure on Japan to occupy Indochina, or peacefully resolve her differences with the US.

Japanese expansionism, however, was the target of US pressure. The US price for a peaceful settlement was, in effect, the reversal of the outward expansion that many in Japan saw as vital for national survival. Japan chose the route of continued expansion, and in July 1941 moved occupation troops into southern Indochina, giving her bases from which attacks could be launched on Singapore and the Philippines. The US response was, on 26 July, to freeze all Japanese assets in this country, denying her hard currency with which to purchase war materials and completing the economic blockade of Japan.

Japan had not expected such a sharp response to her move into Indochina. Japanese strategic planners, without abandoning efforts to reach a diplomatic solution, now began serious planning for war in the Western Pacific. Two plans were developed: One to simultaneously attack the Philippines and Malaya, then advance along both axes to the East Indies; the second was Admiral Yamamoto's plan for a surprise attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor. The final plan, completed by October, combined these two. by attacking south into Malaya and the Indies, the Japanese sought the abundant raw materials in these areas that were vital to Japan's war effort. To secure the islands, however, US presence in the area had to be neutralized through the destruction of the fleet in Hawaii, the elimination of US bases in the Philippines, and the cutting of US lines of communication through the seizure of Wake and Guam.

This plan sought to establish a buffer zone for the home islands and provide a source of raw materials as well as secure economic lines of communication in the area. Defeat of the US was not necessary; rather, a war of limited objectives was envisioned, followed by a negotiated settlement legitimizing Japanese conquests to establish her "Co-Prosperity Sphere."

Prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States faced a trying situation. Supporting Britain in Europe by nearly all means short of sending troops, at the same time the US was preparing for war against Japan in the far east. But there was widespread feeling against the US entering

the European war herself. Without an overt attack on US forces, public support for a war against Japan in the Western Pacific would have been even harder to mobilize. Feeling that no options were left save war or submission to US and British restraints upon their expansion, the Japanese reluctantly chose to attack. They reasoned that by means of their quick strike against Pearl, they could establish a Western Pacific empire large enough and deep enough that the US would prefer a negotiated settlement to a long and costly campaign. Sensible though their reasoning may have been at the time, this was their most serious failure. They severely underestimated the effect that the attack would have upon mobilizing American support for war.

CHAPTER TWO

WORLD WAR II AND THE PHILIPPINE CAMPAIGN

Early Strategies

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese attacked the US fleet at Pearl Harbor. Hours later, they attacked US forces in the Philippines. Both strikes achieved complete surprise. The attack on Pearl made decisive offensive action by the US Navy impossible for at least a year, and only the fortuitous absence of all three aircraft carriers from the harbor kept the strike from being a total disaster for the US.

Japan quickly moved to expand her perimeter and consolidate her conquests. Early successes persuaded Japanese planners to expand the original defense line to include Midway Island, southern New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands as bases from which to harass Hawaii and Australia. This led, in May 1942, to the Battle of the Coral Sea, a tactical stand-off but a strategic success for the Allies by preventing the Japanese seizure of Port Moresby. The following month marked the first major defeat of the Japanese fleet at one of the decisive battles of the war: Midway, in which Japan lost her entire carrier fleet. Other, less significant setbacks for the Japanese also occurred at Papua and Guadalcanal, and by the end of 1942 Japan was shifting to a defensive posture.

Japan still was following her original strategy. She hoped to set up a defensive perimeter and discouraged the Allies from waging a long and costly war to achieve a decisive victory. But by this time, US mobilization had provided a rapidly growing naval strength, concentrated largely in the Pacific, and neither the US nor Britain entertained thoughts of a negotiated peace.

The Allied Offensive

The American industrial base had begun to provide a decisive advantage to US forces by 1943, although that year was marked more by exasperating slow progress for the allies rather than any sudden flashes of success. MacArthur was developing his famous "island-hopping" strategy of bypassing strongpoints in order to cut their lines of communication, concentrating on seizing airfields of strategic importance.

The primary setback for the allies was the inability to use China as a base for operations against the Japanese empire. Both the internal struggles between Nationalists and Communists and the logistical impossibility of supplying China through the Japanese screen made that plan inoperable. US planners now turned to examine two routes to the Japanese home islands -- the first through the central Pacific areas under Admiral Nimitz' responsibility, and the second, General MacArthur's southern area on the Australia-New Guinea-Philippines axis. The central Pacific

route was seen as primarily a naval battle, and the principle threat was at that time the still formidable Japanese fleet. In mid-1943, therefore, the Joint Chiefs decided to press along the central route, while at the same time MacArthur would keep up pressure on New Guinea, the Solomons, and the large Japanese base at Rabul.

Once the axis of advance was decided upon, the remaining strategic question was whether the major objective, short of the Japanese home islands, should be Formosa or the Philippines. Formosa was seen, primarily by the Navy, as necessary both to block Japanese lines of communication to the Indies and as a means by which to attack via the China coast. MacArthur argued vehemently in favor of Luzon, in the Philippines, as the strategic target. Operations in China were, by the summer of 1944, viewed as impractical: The Chinese factionalization had greatly weakened the strength of her army, and the Japanese hold on the mainland was so strong that the cost of taking the China coast would not balance its value as a base for attacks on Japan. But however strong the strategic arguments in favor of the Philippines, the emotional ones prevailed. MacArthur had been forced to withdraw from Luzon early in the war, leaving General Wainwright to an ignominious surrender on CORREGIDOR. MacArthur had promised to return to the Philippines, and return he would. Finally, after prolonged debate, the Navy agreed that Luzon was where the central and southern routes should converge.

In late 1944, Japanese defensive plans also focused on the Philippines. Planning was complicated by the division of responsibility for island defense between the army and navy, but by the time of the invasion of Luzon, most of the army-navy differences had been worked out. Defensive forces on Luzon, however, were depleted by the necessity to send troops to Leyte during its defense, and replacements for the Luzon units arrived at only about one-half of the planned strength. The Japanese 14th Area Army was charged with defense of Luzon, and over 50,000 naval personnel from the Southwest Area Fleet were placed under its tactical command.

Manila and Corregidor

Until mid-December, the Japanese considered Manila a rear base of operations for fighting on Leyte. That month, however, allied forces had begun to threaten Luzon, and on 20 December the Manila Naval Defense Force was activated from units of the 31st Special Base Force. The mission of these units, comprised of such diverse groups as the naval stores department, naval transportation department, harbor master's office, and the naval hospital, was to deny the allies use of Manila Bay and air bases in the area by holding CORREGIDOR and Manila until the last. The Manila Naval Defense force was subordinated to Lieutenant General Kobayashi, commander of the army's Manila Defense Force, which was under Shimbu Group.

Preparations for the defense of CORREGIDOR itself began in September, 1944, when elements of the 31st Special Base Force were posted to the island to act as lookouts for antisubmarine patrols and to effect liaison with passing convoys. At the end of September, a surface special attack unit, with 70 suicide boats, was sent to the island. The following month, the garrison on the island was reinforced by an air defense unit as well as a number of survivors of ships sunk at Leyte. A construction unit was also sent to repair the fortress guns. These units, along with those on the smaller harbor islands, formed the Manila Bay Entrance Defense Force, under the command of Navy Captain Akira Itagaki, senior staff officer, 31st Special Base Force. Lieutenant Commander Shoichi Koyamada, staff officer, Southwest Area Fleet, commanded the surface special attack unit.

MacArthur's plan for the capture of the Philippines as finally executed consisted of three phases: Seizures of major air and supply bases on Leyte from which to support the main thrust at Luzon; the invasion of Luzon itself; and recapture of islands in the south that were bypassed initially. Although the allies viewed the main effort as being the seizure of Luzon, the Japanese decided to make their stand at Leyte, and their defeat in that area marked the beginning of the fall of the Philippines.

With the fall of Leyte, General Tomoyuki Yamashita, commander of the 14th Area Army, began final preparation for the defense of Luzon. With uncertain reinforcements and supply lines, Yamashita knew that he had no hope of defending the entire island. He decided to conduct a static defense in mountain strongholds to the northeast and east of Lingayen Gulf, feeling that he could not hold the strategic central plains-Manila Bay region. Only token defenses were left in that area. Yamashita's goal was to tie up as many of MacArthur's forces as he could for a protracted time, buying more time for forces preparing defense of Okinawa and the home islands.

When Yamashita made his decision to conduct a static defense from mountain strongholds, CORREGIDOR lost its significance in his plans. He had already conceded the strategically important bay region to the allies. Even so, Japanese forces on the island could harass shipping within the bay, and unrestricted allied use of the harbor would be impossible.

CHAPTER THREE

PLANNING THE OPERATION

Tactical planning for the CORREGIDOR operation was a well executed joint planning sequence between very experienced units that had worked together for the previous three years. The joint force planning was complete and well coordinated. The success of the operation may largely be attributed to the planning. This chapter, the planning for the operation, will examine the terrain and weather, the concept of the operation, the enemy situation, forces allocated, preparation for the operation, and the two phases--airborne and amphibious.

Terrain and Weather

CORREGIDOR has aptly been called a fortified rock as it well was. For over 300 years this island at the entrance of Manila Bay had been used to protect the "Pearl of the Orient." The island is less than one square mile in area and shaped something like a "tadpole." The island is about 6300 meters long with the western part known as "TOPSIDE" being approximately 2100 meters north to south and 2500 meters east to west. The island narrows to 400 meters between North Dock and South Dock (figure 3-1). TOPSIDE rises sharply from the narrow beaches forming serrated ravines and rock cliffs which provide the dominating terrain. The rock walls are covered with shrub growth. They rise up to an elevation of 160 meters in less than 320 meters. There are major ravines that run from the water's edge to TOPSIDE. These ravines with the narrow beaches make lateral movement extremely difficult on the side of TOPSIDE. The island is split at San Jose. The eastern part of the island is the narrow tail of the "tadpole", approximately 3800 meters in length. The beaches are wider and present the best suitable locations for amphibious landings, in fact, the Japanese used the northern beaches in 1942. The dominate terrain feature is Malinta Hill that rises to approximately 80 meters. While the terrain is not as restrictive as TOPSIDE, because of the narrowness and the sandy beaches maneuverability is restricted.

The island had numerous fortified caves, fighting positions and a very extensive tunnel system. After the Japanese captured the island, they rebuilt the battle positions and tunnels adding to them as required to strengthen their defensive plan to defend against an amphibious assault.

When the Japanese captured the island in 1942 the terrain especially on TOPSIDE was not heavily damaged by the battle with bomb craters. For example, the golf course sustained little damage. However, with the years of neglect, war and especially the bombardments prior to the battle, the island became a mass of craters, bombed out buildings and other obstacles to movement and an airdrop.

Due to the acute explosions on the island prior to the US surrender the water table on the island was changed which resulted in the wells and active water supplies being dried up. The only possible exception was the pre-war pumping plant at JAMES RAVINE which was reportedly still being used by the Japanese; however the US forces never used it. Therefore, significant amounts of fresh water had to be brought in and stockpiled.

Weather in February 1945 favored a combined airborne and amphibious operation. During February, considered part of the dry season, sudden rain showers could be expected, but they would be light and brief. Visibility was generally good. There was only a slight early morning mist and no prevailing haze formations. The sun table for 15 and 16 February 1945 reflected sunrise at 0720 and sunset at 1901 giving approximately fourteen hours of militarily useable daylight. During the same period moonlight was almost nonexistent as the moon was in a new moon phase. The major disadvantage to an airborne operation was the high winds. The prevailing winds blow from the north to south and northeast to southwest. Wind velocity averages 15-20 mph with gusts of 25-35 mph making jumping into a small landing zone difficult.

Concept of the Operation

All intelligence estimates determined that the Japanese were expecting an amphibious landing, if the US even planned to take the island. Based on the Japanese losses suffered when they assaulted the island, any amphibious assault would be costly in terms of men, equipment and time. Therefore, a surprise plan was developed with the main assault being an airborne operation on TOPSIDE and a supporting attack of an amphibious landing on BLACK BEACH (SAN JOSE). It was expected that the Japanese would be caught totally unaware, because an airborne operation does not appear to be feasible on this island due to its size, the terrain, high winds and the obstacles in any possible landing zone. The risk and danger to the troops were predicted to be great, in fact, drop casualties were expected to be 20%. However, the risks were far out weighted by the expected results that the element of surprise would achieve.

The objectives of the airborne force were to establish security for the landing zones, then extend the perimeter out to control TOPSIDE and conduct link-up operations with the amphibious force. Finally, the mission was to destroy the enemy force. The amphibious force was to establish a beachhead, split the island, perform link-up operations, and clear the tail of the island of enemy forces. The mission was initially to secure the island; later it became force oriented. The scheme is depicted on map (figure 3-2).

CORREGIDOR ISLAND

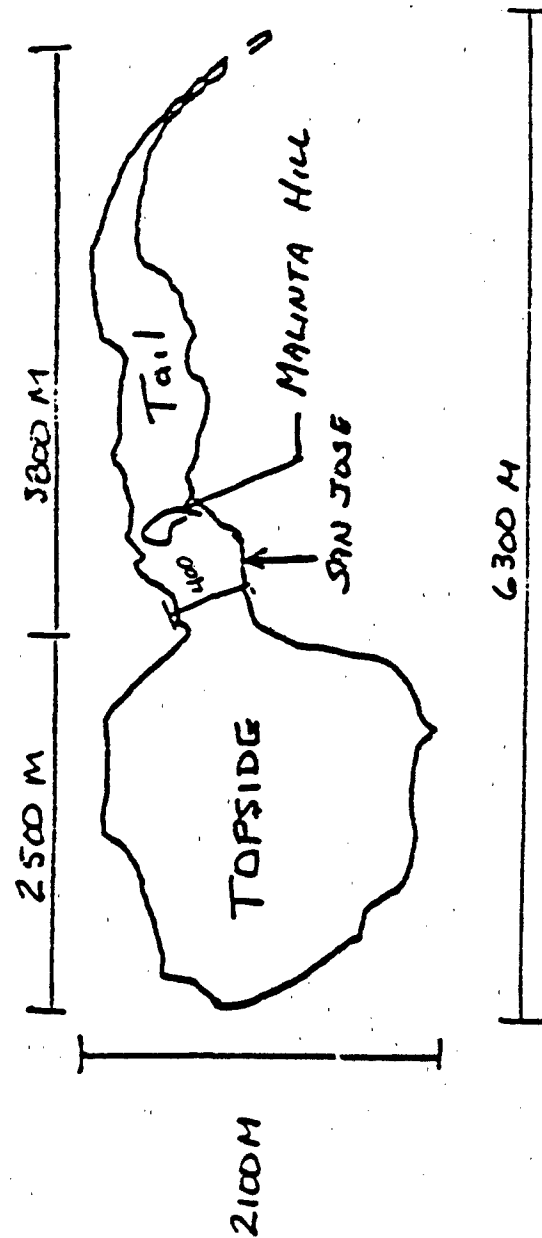
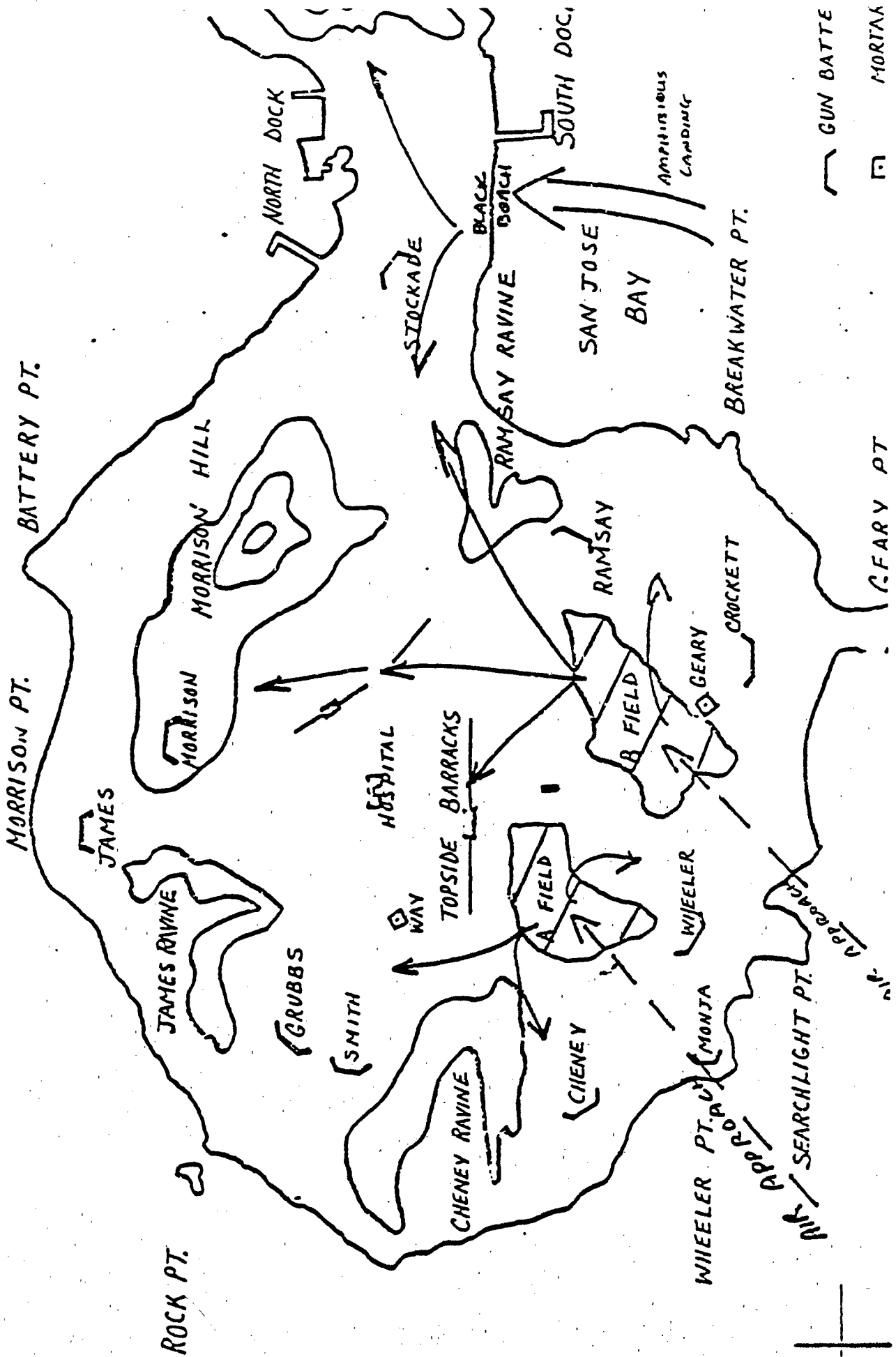


Figure 3-1

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



GUN BATTE

MORTAR

SEARCHLIGHT PT.

Enemy Situation

Captured documents established the presence of the 3d Battalion 22d FA Regt (less one battery) armed with 150mm guns and totally approximately 500 men on the island. Intelligence planners estimated the Japanese force to be a minimum of 850. They had no positive indication as to his scheme of defense nor the location of his major combat units, command posts and supporting weapons. The intelligence estimates, the knowledge gained from US personnel who previously had defended the island and US defensive plans were the bases for the development of the enemy picture that the "ROCK FORCE" had prior to the landings.

The true enemy situation was far more hazardous. Although there are conflicting reports, it is figured that the total strength on the island approached 6000. One of the captured documents revealed that possibly the enemy force numbered 5062 (figure 3-3). The force was commanded by a special staff officer who was a naval captain, Captain Akira ITAGAKI. This adhoc force consisted of various types of army and naval units most of which were understrength. Most of the naval units were not suited for ground combat. Most of the army forces were organized on a provisional basis. Many of the units were partially filled by survivors from decimated units and sunken ships. Although the force was large, it was not organized as an effective fighting force with well trained combat soldiers.

Of the estimated 6000 Japanese approximately 3000 were disposed in prepared positions on the defensive perimeter. These positions were located in deeply serrated ravines that were like fingers of a hand leading from the shore to TOPSIDE separating the positions and making lateral movement along the beach or over the intervening ridges extremely difficult. Communication wire lines were from the various strongpoints in the ravines to a central location on TOPSIDE with no lateral communication nor back up systems. The remainder of the force was concentrated in the MALINTA HILL and TUNNEL area. Some of the major unit locations are depicted on the enclosed map (figure 3-4).

In general, the Japanese defense plan was to defend the island from an amphibious assault. All defensive positions were oriented toward the sea. The plan had four major objectives:

- a. to prevent amphibious landings on the main portion of the island,
- b. to prevent amphibious landings at or near SAN JOSE,
- c. to provide a reserve to reinforce the defense of the ROCK,
- d. to contain a landing on the tail south of SAN JOSE.

This is a copy of one of the documents captured on CORREGIDOR after the fighting. This example is only one indication of the Japanese forces on the island, there is not true picture of their actual force composition.

Organization chart of "Bay Entrance Defense Force", captured CORREGIDOR, 24 Feb. 1945. Document undated.

Translation:

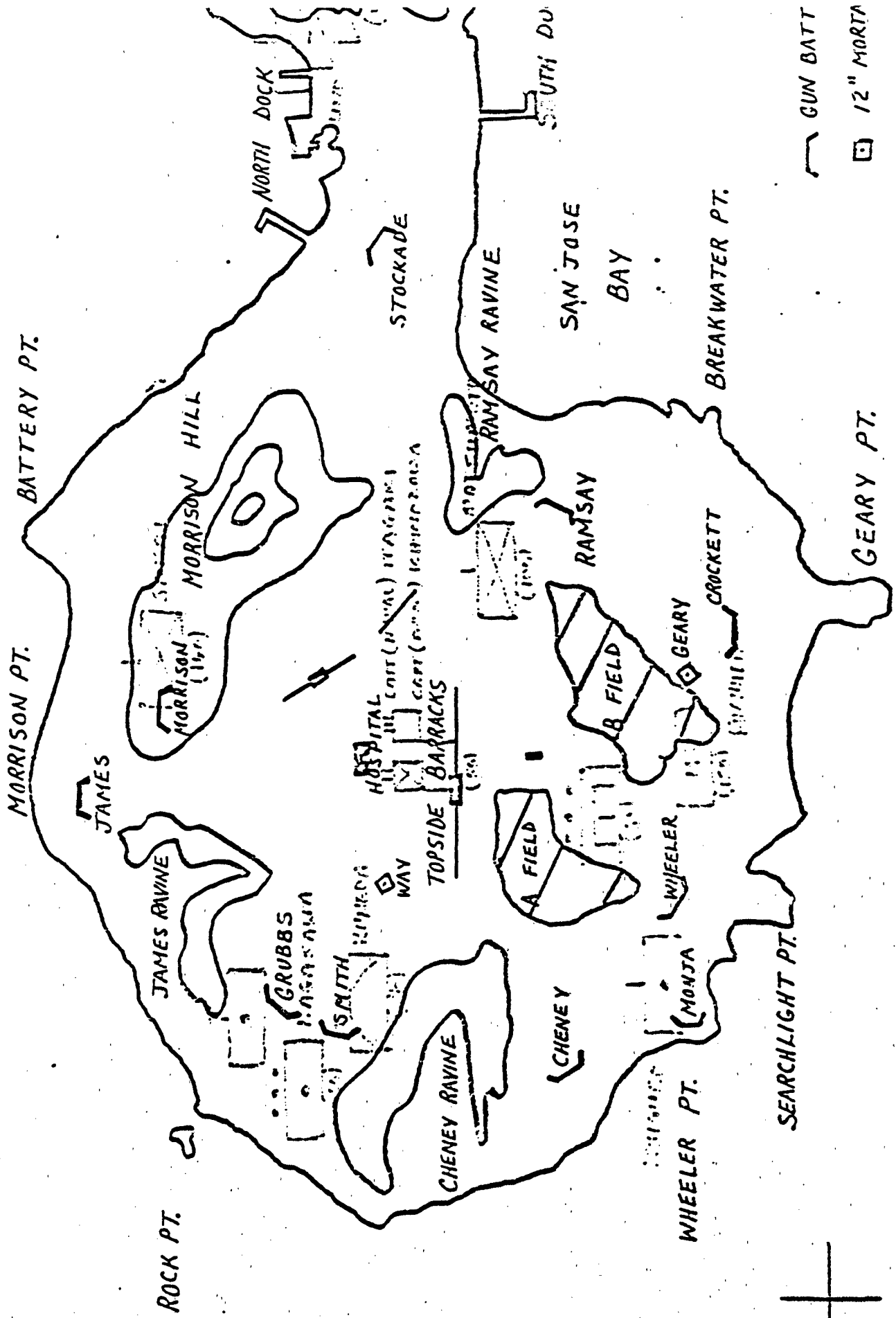
		CORREGIDOR			
<u>Unit</u>		<u>Officers</u>	<u>NCO & EM</u>	<u>Army Civilians</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>No.</u>					
Hq. Attchd.		17	98	-	115
1st Btry (Fort),	Lt.(Navy) ENDO	1	43	-	44
2nd " "	Ensign FUNAKI	1	29	-	30
3rd " "	Lt. (jg) OMOTE	2	92	-	94
4th " "	WO YAMOMOTO	1	34	-	35
5th " "	Ensign TAKAHASHI				
1st DUAL purpose gun					
2nd " "	Btry (Fort) Ensign ISHIGURO	1	98	-	99
3rd " "	Ensign FURUTANI	1	78	-	79
1st MG Battery	Ensign TAMURA	1	73	-	74
2nd " "	WO ARAKI	1	66	-	67
3rd " "	WO TASHIRO	1	66	-	67
4th " "	WO HARATAKE	1	68	-	69
Hq. Pl. Suicide Unit (SHINOTAI)		-	18	-	18
9th Suicide Unit	Lt.(jg) NAKASHIMA	7	169	-	176
10th " "	Lt.(Navy) ISHIKAWA	8	175	-	183
11th " "	Lt. " YAMASAKI	7	194	-	201
12th " "	Lt.(jg) MATSUE	7	192	-	199
13th " "	Lt.(jg) HORIUCHI	6	181	-	187
Torpedo Boat Unit		14	111	-	125
Water Patrol "		14	257	93	364
"A" Guard Post					
"B" " "					
"C" " "					
MININTA Lookout					
Min. maintenance					
Artillery Dept.					

3rd Asabu Maru				
17th " "				
Hakko Maru				
Ikuo Maru				
3d Army Eng. Personnel				
Land Garrison Unit Capt. SHINOZAWA	25	792	5	822
Signal Unit Maj. OYAMADA				
(Telegraph)	-	(23	-	
(Radar)	-	(31	-	54
Adm. Unit Lt.(Navy) UEDA				
(Electricians)				
(Supplementary)	1	45	-	46
(Engr's. Const.)	2	-	27	29
(Transport)				
Armament Unit Tech.Lt.(Navy)GOTO	2	-	58	60
Expeditionary Unit				
Civil Eng. Dept.,				
219th Const. Tech Capt. SHIDA	5	23	313	341
328th Cons. Bn. Tech Lt.(Navy)KINO	6	283	-	289
331ST Cons. Bn. Comdr. YOSHIDA	16	806	-	822
Medical Unit Med. Lt. (Navy)				
FUTABASHI	1	27	-	28
Poster Unit Lt.(Navy) MATSUMOTO				
Attend. Units				
Material Dept.				
Transport Dept.	-	-	7	7
Army attend. Units				
Ordance Depot				
Signal attendants				
111th Fishing Unit				
Army	-	4	66	70
Navy	-	10?	-	
Searchlight Unit WO USUI	1	38	-	39
MARIVELES Lumbering				
Expeditionary Unit WO CHAYAMO	1	150	-	151
(In Sic)		65	7	72
Total	151	4344	576	5062

Note: Captain ITAGAKI of the Japanese Navy was the Commanding Officer of CORREGIDOR. He is listed in other documents captured as CO 31st Special Naval base CORREGIDOR.

Figure 3-3

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



— GUN BATT
 □ 12" MORTA

The enemy had adequate stocks of weapons, ammunition, rations, water and explosives. These were stored in dumps conveniently located with respect to his defensive plan, but were not mobile and readily available for any contingency operations. There was no apparent plan for resupply, especially that of water when existing stocks were depleted. Since the lack of water was a factor in the US surrender of the island and there were limited fresh water sources, this could have been a Japanese weakness. There were reports by POWs of the lack of water.

In the conclusions of the intelligence annex of the operation order prior to the operation, weather was not expected to affect enemy operations. Terrain, however, would be a great disadvantage to the enemy should he try to maneuver from his strongpoints to counter the airborne operation and regain TOPSIDE. Most of the caves and tunnels that were built both pre-war and by the Japanese were oriented towards the beaches. They were located from just above beach level to 180 meters above on the very steep slopes. These locations in the ravines had limited mobility and lacked the ability to fire up the slopes. For the Japanese to leave the defensive positions in the ravine approaches would prove to be equally hazardous, as heavy naval gun fire could be directed onto the ravines causing great casualties for the Japanese. Also, for a force to counterattack from Malinta Hill, they would have to face the amphibious force and naval gun fire. The caves and ravines would prove to be great defensive positions for an attack from the beach, but seizure of the commanding high ground by the airborne assault would place the enemy at a distinct terrain disadvantage.

Intelligence reports concluded enemy capabilities as

Artillery fire from FT. HUGHES (CAPALLO IS.), CAVITE FT. DRUM, (EL FRAILLE IS.), FT. FRANK (CARABAO IS.), OR S. BATAAN coast from any batteries remaining active. Possible movement of suicide elements by water from S. BATAAN. (Intelligence was not aware of the approximately 70 Maru 4 suicide boats on CORREGIDOR.) Artillery fire from artillery Bn. reported stationed on CORREGIDOR. Infiltrating elements possibly at night. Concentration of enemy forces in CORREGIDOR prior to D day, if intimation of impending landing is received by the enemy.

Forces Allocated

The task force selected to conduct the assault on CORREGIDOR was commonly known as the "ROCK FORCE." Colonel G. M. Jones, the commanding officer of 503d Parachute Infantry RCT, was the force commander. Colonel G. M. Jones was a 33 year old West Point graduate. The force consisted of the 503d Parachute Infantry RCT, 462d FA Battalion (Parachute) and 161st Engineer Company (Parachute) for the airborne force and the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry (Reinforced) for the amphibious assault force.

The units in the parachute phase, the 503d Parachute Infantry RCT and the 317th Troop Carrier Group (the group responsible to lifting the force), had worked together for the past two years. Early in 1943 they had conducted a jump training program and paratroop maneuver in Cairns, Australia. On 5 September 1943 in the Lae operation, the 317th Group dropped the 503d Regiment at Nadzab, New Guinea. On 3 and 4 July 1944 they again dropped the 503d, this time into Noemfoor Island, Netherland East Indies.

The amphibious force had previously worked with the naval force, Seventh Amphibious Force. In fact, this plan had the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry making an amphibious landing into MARIVELES BAY on 15 February then on the morning of 16 February loading on landing crafts for the assault on CORREGIDOR at 1030 hours.

Both of those forces were very knowledgeable of what was expected and how to plan and execute a joint operation. The SOPs, the previously established liaison and past experiences greatly increased the chances of success.

Preparation for the Operation

Beginning 23 January 1945 daily bombing of the island was conducted by the 5th Air Force. A total of 3,128 tons of bombs were dropped on the island. On 15 February naval gunfire was added. The purpose of the bombings and the naval gunfire was to inflict casualties, destroy stores and installations, disrupt and destroy Japanese communication networks, and more importantly to reduce to a minimum the enemy strength kept on TOPSIDE during daylight hours. Just prior to and during the airborne landing, A-20s bombed and strafed the island for possible enemy targets that could or were firing on the force. Prior to the amphibious assault the navy conducted minesweeping operations in the area. Additionally, naval gunfire was directed at specific targets that might effect the landing, such as gun positions. Most gun positions were knocked out.

Aerial reconnaissance and photography was carried on, but in such a manner as not to draw too much attention and to conceal the intent of a parachute drop. Commanders to include company level were flown over the target area in bombers beginning 12 February. Aerial photography included vertical and oblique shots. From these photographs and the intelligence gained from those who had served on the island, maps were made. A scale sandbox model of the island was made and studied by all personnel. There was a combined meeting between the pilots and the commanders of the 503d Regiment to discuss the scheme of maneuver over the sandbox. The naval force and landing force also had joint planning sessions as well as a joint visual reconnaissance prior to the landing. During this visual reconnaissance the commander of the 3/34 Infantry was able to instruct the naval force on the precise targets he wished to engage just prior to and during the landing.

Airborne Phase

The airborne phase of the operation was restricted by the size and location of the landing zones, wind speed and number of aircraft available. The drop zones were located on TOPSIDE. Zone A was the old parade ground which was 460 meters in length going southwest to northeast. The width of the zone varied from 60 to 210 meters. Zone B was the old golf course which was about 460 meters in length and width varied from 140 meters to 180-210 meters. At the approach ends of the zones were precipitous cliffs that dropped off abruptly to Manila Bay and on the far side there were bomb-shattered frameworks and rubble-wrecked buildings. Both drop zones were very small, littered with wreckage, tree stumps, large bomb craters and other anti-parachute obstacles along with the steep cliffs.

The plan was to fly three lifts, two lifts on 16 February and one on 17 February. Each was to have two single files over the drop zone, one for each zone with 600 feet (180 meters) separation between aircraft. Initially each plane would make two passes, dropping half a stick each. After the joint planning sessions and the advice of the jumpmasters, it was decided that there would be three passes. If the "go" signal at the critical point were not given there would be an additional pass.

With the winds expected to be 15-20 mph from the northeast and the flight from the southwest, the jumpmasters would count 3 seconds before giving the jump commands after the "go" light. Jump level would be 1150 feet (350 meters) above sea level and 550 (167 meters) above TOPSIDE. The aircraft would be traveling at 100 mph. This would give less than 6 seconds over the drop zone. With .5 seconds per man to exit the airplane they could expect to drop a maximum 10-12 individuals, for planning 8 individuals were figured.

The first planes were to approach the landing zones at 0830 16 February. The lead plane would act as a command plane until the first lift was dropped. Colonel Jones and members of the staff were to be in the command plane piloted by Lieutenant Colonel John Lackey, the Commanding Officer of the 317th Troop Carrier Group. All pilots were to monitor a common frequency for any changes in drop instruction from the command plane. The planes using drop Zone A were to use a left hand pattern after dropping and Zone B would use a right hand pattern. The planes would then circle and pass again in order, until the entire plane load was dropped.

Lifts to be made from SAN JOSE, MONDORO, were as follows:

a. First lift, 51 C-47s take-off at 0715 16 February and over the target at 0830.

3d Bn 503d
Det Hq 503d
161st Eng Co
Det Hq Btry 462d FA Bn
Btry A 462d FA Bn (75mm How)
Plat Btry D 462d FA Bn (.50 cal HMG)

b. Second lift, 51 C-47s take-off at 1100 hours 16 February and over target area at 1215 hours.

Det Hq 503d
2d Bn 503d
Sv Co 503d
Plat Btry D 462d FA Bn (.50 cal HMG)
Btry B 462d FA Bn (75mm How)

c. Third lift, 43 C-47s take-off at 0715 hours 17 February and over the target at 0830.

Remainder Hq 503d
1st Bn 503d
Plat Btry D 462d FA Bn (.50 cal HMG)
Btry C 462d FA Bn (75mm How)

d. Fourth lift, (Resupply) 12 C-47s to begin on completion of third lift. Twelve C-47s were allocated for daily resupply until the amphibious resupply from the beach could be accomplished.

Amphibious Phase

As an integrated and coordinated part of the assault on CORREGIDOP an amphibious landing was to be made on BLACK BEACH (SAN JOSE) by the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry (Reinforced). The landing was scheduled for 16 February at 1030 hours. The purpose of the landing was stated as:

a. to split the island between South Dock and North Dock, contain and destroy enemy forces on the "TAIL" and in the MALINTA HILL area (to include the tunnels),

b. to secure a beachhead for amphibious supply and evacuation and,

c. to establish link-up with the 503d in establishing road communications between the beach and TOPSIDE.

The actual plans for the operation could not be precise, because of the uncertainty of the ground fight that could be materially influenced by the enemy. The mission was simply to seize the island and destroy the enemy force.

The task organization for amphibious force is as follows:

- 3d Bn 34th Inf Regt (Reinf)
- Btry A, 950th AA Aw Bn
- 18th Port Surg Hosp (Reinf)
- 174th Ord Sv Det (Bomb Disposal Sq)
- Det 98th Sig Bn
- Det 592d EB & SR
- Det 1st Plat, 603d Tk Co
- Det 592d JASCO
- Det 6th SAP
- 3d Plat, AT Co, 34th Inf
- 3d Plat, Cannon Co, 34th Inf

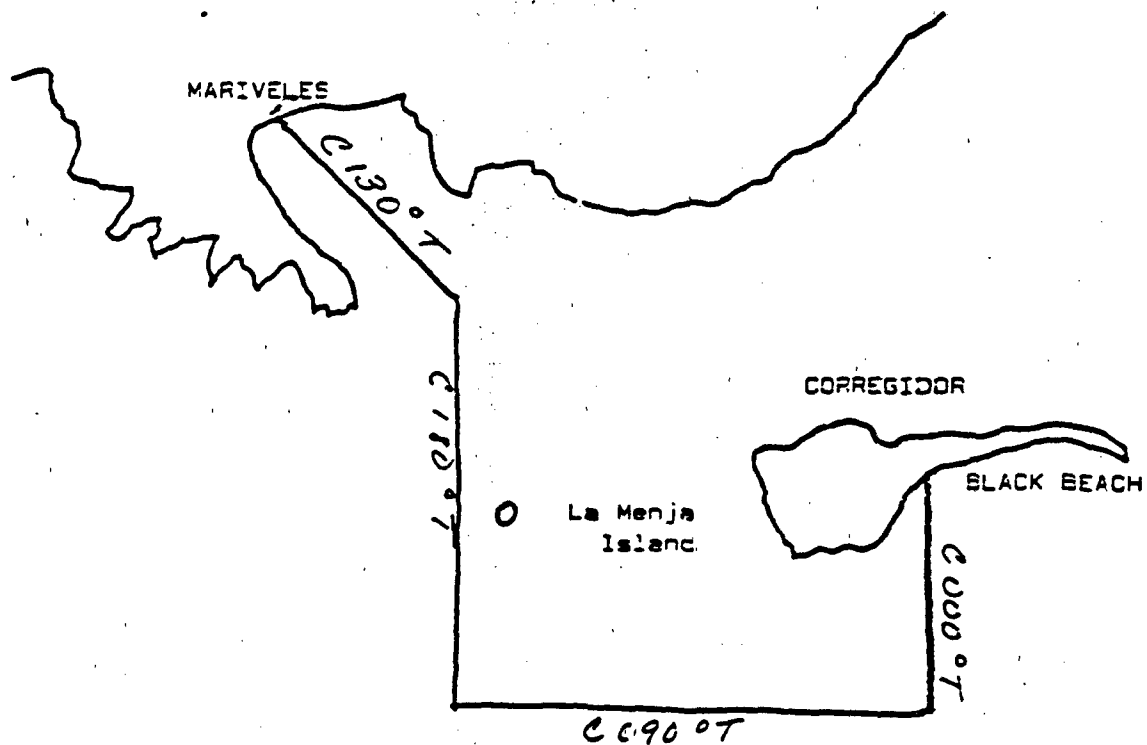
Command and control of the force was passed to the Commanding Officer of the ROCK FORCE upon its landing and establishing the beach head on the island.

BLACK BEACH (CORREGIDOR) is located just west of South Dock in the area of SAN JOSE. The beach is on the long slim portion of the island where it joins with TOPSIDE. The exposed portion of beach is a sand beach 210 meters long and 9 meters deep. Directly to the rear of the beach is a flat sandy area (275 meters long by 320 meters deep). The area surrounding the sandy area rises quickly from sea level to 30-90 meters. About 70 meters back of the beach was a one meter high barricade. The entire beach area was cratered. There were wire obstructions on the beach and the beach was mined with land contact mines. There are two roads that cross the island and are joined in this area. They provide access to TOPSIDE and the tail. They were heavily cratered. There were no offshore obstructions for an amphibious operation; however, the amphibious force had no positive information as to whether the water off the beaches was protected by nets, booms or other underwater obstacles. The gradient of submerged beach allowed for LCM dry ramp landings.

In the early dawn of 17 February, the amphibious force that landed the previous day at MARIVELES, LUZON was to be loaded onto LCM's and transported for the assault on SAN JOSE BEACH (BLACK BEACH), CORREGIDOR at 1030 hours (figure 3-5).

With the planning completed the battle began on the morning of 16 February.

Movement Diagram of Amphibious Force to CORREGIDOR.



ORANGE (MARIVELES) to BLACK BEACH (SAN JOSE, CORREGIDOR) is 12 miles.

Figure 3-5.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE AIRBORNE AND AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT

The operation to recapture CORREGIDOR is an excellent example of interservice cooperation and coordination. The D Day for this operation was actually on the 15th of February when Task Force 78 (TF), also known as the Seventh Amphibious Force, landed the 34th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) at Mariveles on the Bataan peninsula. The 5th Air Force provided support for the operation with the aerial bombardment and on call airstrikes. Elements of TF 78 also provided preparatory and on call fires before and during the operations. The 16th of February 1945 operation to put US forces on CORREGIDOR was especially well coordinated. For example, the 5th Air Force provided bombardment of the island in conjunction with the Navy. As the 317th Troop Carrier Group began dropping the initial elements of the 503rd RCT, fires were shifted to cliffs away from the drop zones. A sub-element of TF 78 picked up the 3rd Bn, 34th RCT (R) and moved it in landing craft to make an assault on the seaward side of the island. A B-25 was overhead from 0800 to 1600 to provide command and control of all air elements and communications with the commander, TF 78. The commander of the Rock TF and 317th Troop Carrier Group were also together and airborne in a C-47 to control the air landing of the 503rd.

This section will address primarily the ground elements and mention air and naval support only in passing. This is done for two reasons, brevity and focus on land forces.

To resummarize, the mission of Rock Force was to conduct airborne and amphibious operations to recapture the island of CORREGIDOR. To be more specific, on 16 February, the 503rd RCT was to drop on "TOPSIDE", secure a perimeter, support the landing of the 3/34 and be prepared to conduct combat operations as necessary. The 3/34 was to conduct an amphibious assault at black beach, secure Malinta Hill, secure an initial beachhead and be prepared to conduct operations to link up with and secure a sea-land support route for the 503rd RCT. (See figure 4-1)

The 3/503 was taking off as the Navy commenced their portion of the assault's preparatory fires. Elements of TF 78 rained shells of up to six inches on the island from various cruisers and destroyers. At 0745 hours, a heavy bombardment group (B-24) hit the island. As the B-24s finished, A-20 and B-25 aircraft began to bomb and strafe. When the troop carriers arrived at 0830, the A-20s moved their strafing runs to the cliffs around the island. During the day, there were two B-25s circling the island. One B-25 was a command and control ship, the other was an Air Force observer to pick new targets and report on the effectiveness of the air strikes. To facilitate operations, there was an integrated fire plan with specific instructions for air and naval loiter zones, fire control zones, procedures to pass fighter control from air to naval to ground units, and procedures

for maximum ordinate and safe corridor information. The SOP fighter cover for 16 February was twelve aircraft, either P47 or P51. Of the twelve, four would carry napalm, the other eight would carry two 500-pound bombs per aircraft. The planes were to sit ground alert at San Masselino and be immediately available for close air support, as requested.

With this as a prelude, two long files of C-47s approached CORREGIDOR from the southwest. Due to the size of the drop zones, only one aircraft could drop at a time, thus necessitating the column of two's formation. At 0830, the first stick jumped at 600 feet and were blown back from the drop zones to land on the cliffs. Colonel Jones, commander of the 503rd, was observing the operation from the command ship of the 317th TCG and ordered the jump height to be lowered to 400 feet. This was still not enough, and the jump masters had to add a five to ten second count after the green light to land their sticks on the DZ. Twenty-five aircraft dropped on DZ-B; twenty-six dropped on DZ-A. The sticks were of no more than six to eight soldiers and many aircraft had to make three passes to complete their drops. The plane loads ran from ten to twenty-four soldiers and up to nine drop bundles. The aircraft carrying the field artillery had the most bundles and the fewest jumpers. Within one hour, the 3rd Bn 503rd (R) had landed. This action put three infantry companies, a 75mm pack howitzer battery, a 50 cal. machine gun platoon, engineer company (-), Bn HQ and elements of the regimental HQ on the TOPSIDE. (A total 1007 personnel and 191 bundles dropped; see figure 4-2)

Surprise was absolute! Between the heavy bombardment and element of surprise, there was no organized resistance. The various sources reported scattered sniper fire and individual actions against Japanese that just happened to be where a paratrooper landed.

Most casualties suffered by the battalion were a result of the high winds, small drop zones, and exceedingly rough ground. There were several paratroopers killed by the enemy, but they had been blown over cliffs into Japanese positions or fields of fire that had been prepared to defend against amphibious invasion. PT boats from TF 78 rescued nine paratroopers from the beach on the 16th. As troopers moved to rally points and assembly areas, they encountered small Japanese positions or spider holes which they neutralized as they found them. There are several stories describing the demise of the island's commander. The most repeated story is that a group of paratroopers moving to an assembly area encountered the command OP and neutralized it and its occupants. The enemy's two principle command posts were reported on TOPSIDE, just outside the drop zones. Either the bombardment or the paratroopers eliminated the CPs. While nobody is sure how it really happened, the island commander died on 16 February.

1000

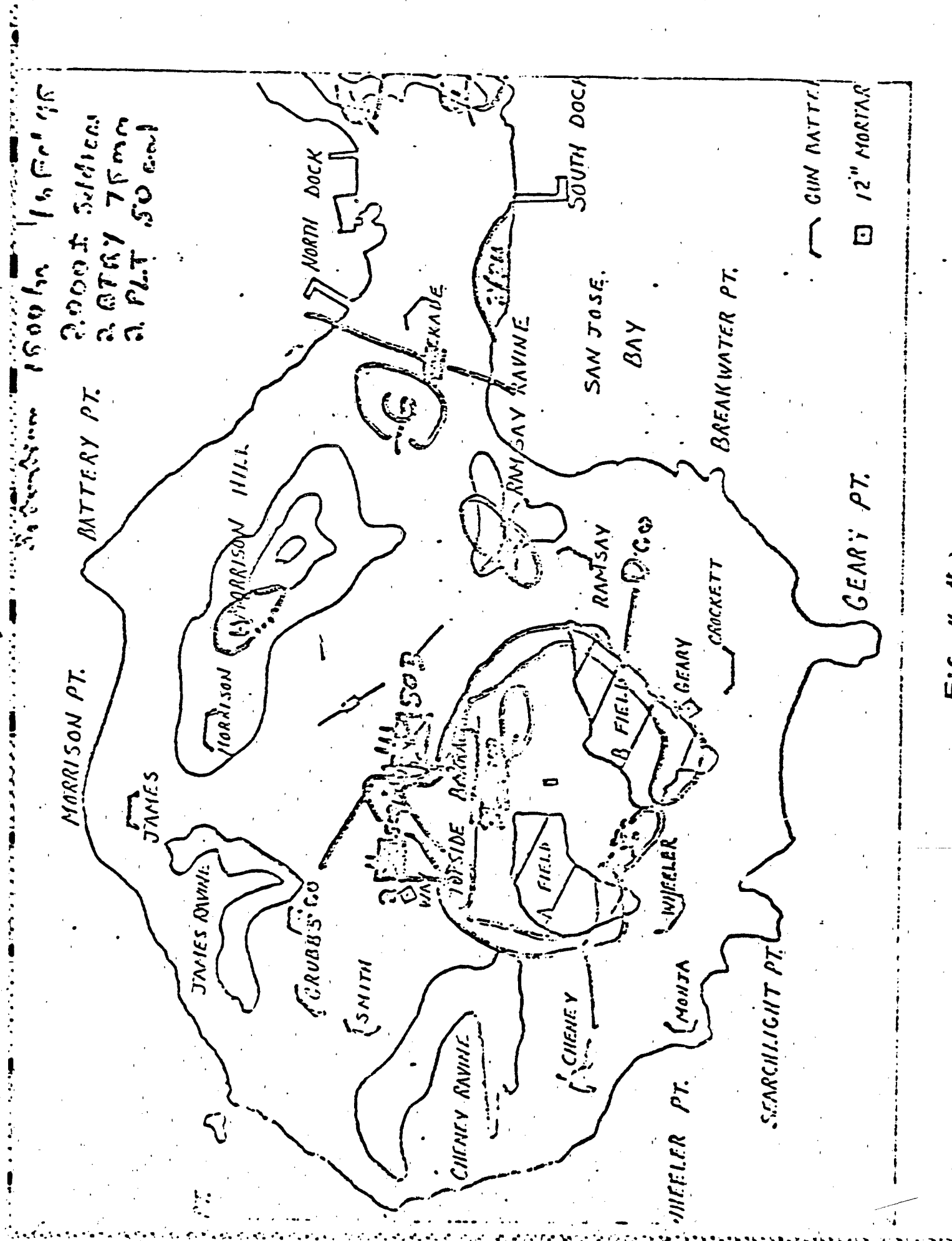
The 3rd Bn consolidated its perimeter and recovered equipment as the units got organized. There are references to attempts by the 503rd commander to cancel the afternoon drop because of the wind conditions. However, the message failed to get through in time and the 2nd Bn, 503rd (R) departed for the drop zones as previously scheduled.

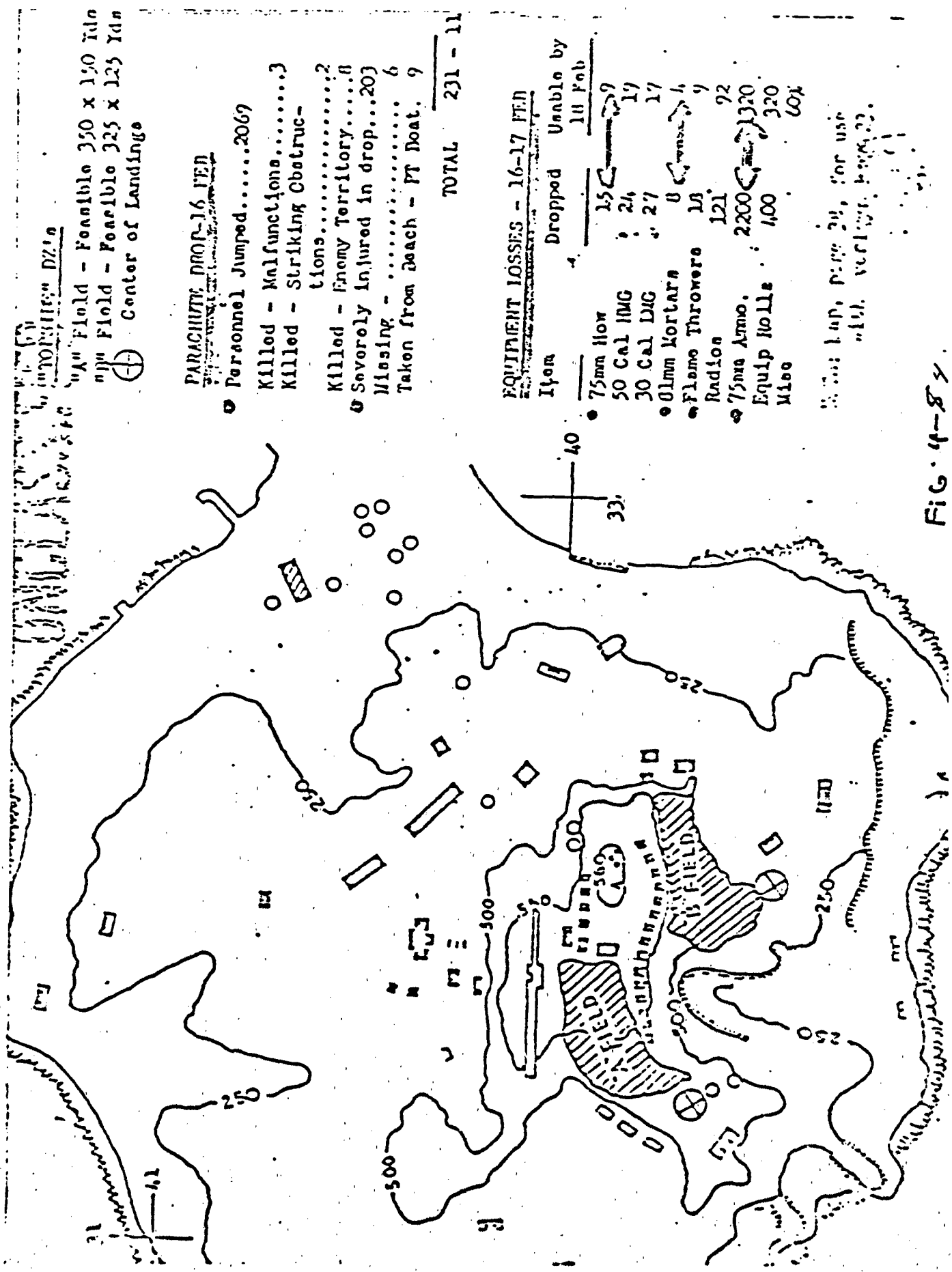
The 2nd Bn 503rd jumped in about 1230 hours using the same procedures as earlier in the day. The 2nd Bn encountered less trouble landing in or near the DZ because of the earlier experience of the 3rd Bn. During the second drop, there were more reports of small arms fire and machine guns directed at the jumpers and the C-47s, but the fire was generally ineffective. There was no organized resistance and no anti-aircraft weapons were employed against the troop carriers. Fifty-one C-47s added their loads to the already crowded drop zone. One more infantry battalion, the rest of the engineer company, another battery and a half of the field artillery, and the majority of the regimental HQ landed on TOPSIDE. The second flight doubled the US force to just over 2000 men and a significant amount of light infantry equipment. However, it must be noted that some of the equipment was not yet recovered and some did not survive the drop.

Several references mention crowding in the drop zones to the point of it being a greater risk to be hit by another trooper or bundle than by a Japanese. Figure 4-4 shows the total number of personnel and items of equipment dropped in on 16 February.

There was a resupply drop about 1400 hours on the 16th to provide more ammunition, rations, and water. The drop of the 1st Bn 503rd scheduled for the 17th was changed to an amphibious landing because of the unexpected success of the initial landings and the poor DZ conditions.

By 1500 hours on the 16th, the 503rd reported all objectives reached and was deployed as shown in figure 4-3. The night deployment of the 16th is shown as in figure 4-5. The official after action reports recount little or no combat on the first day, especially that night. An anonymous source, a member of the regimental medical section who was on the first lift, speaks of more constant incidents. These were individuals or small groups of Japanese attempting to penetrate the perimeter or bring fire on the perimeter or the recovery parties. He mentions Wheeler point/battery as a problem on the first day and an area of constant fire fights. The Wheeler point area was to be a problem for several days. The anonymous officer alludes to the problem of water. The assault elements jumped with only two canteens per man as their water ration. This was insufficient for combat in the heat of a bare rock tropical island. Water was identified as a problem before the rock force was in place for 24 hours. Anonymous details many stories of personal courage, heroism, death, and humor. One of the day's more humorous events was the regimental dentist's ambush of three Japanese. The dentist was known for his "ferocity", but was especially eager that day to get his "first Jap."





1000' Field - Possible 350 x 150 Yds
 1000' Field - Possible 325 x 125 Yds
 Center of Landings

PARACHUTE DROP-16 FEB

- Personnel Jumped.....2069
- Killed - Malfunctions.....3
- Killed - Striking Obstructions.....2
- Killed - Enemy Territory.....8
- Severely Injured in Drop.....203
- Missing -6
- Taken from Beach - PT Boat. 9

TOTAL 231 - 11

EQUIPMENT LOSSES - 16-17 FEB

Item	Dropped	Unable by 18 Feb
75mm How	15	9
50 Cal MG	24	19
30 Cal MG	27	17
81mm Mortars	8	4
Flame Throwers	18	9
Radio	121	92
75mm Ammo.	2200	320
Equip Hells	400	320
Misc		604

1000' Map, page 20, for use
 "1000' Map, page 22.

Fig. 4-8

NEIGHT PENTAGON
BATTERY PT. 503 REGT (C)
1st Feb 1955

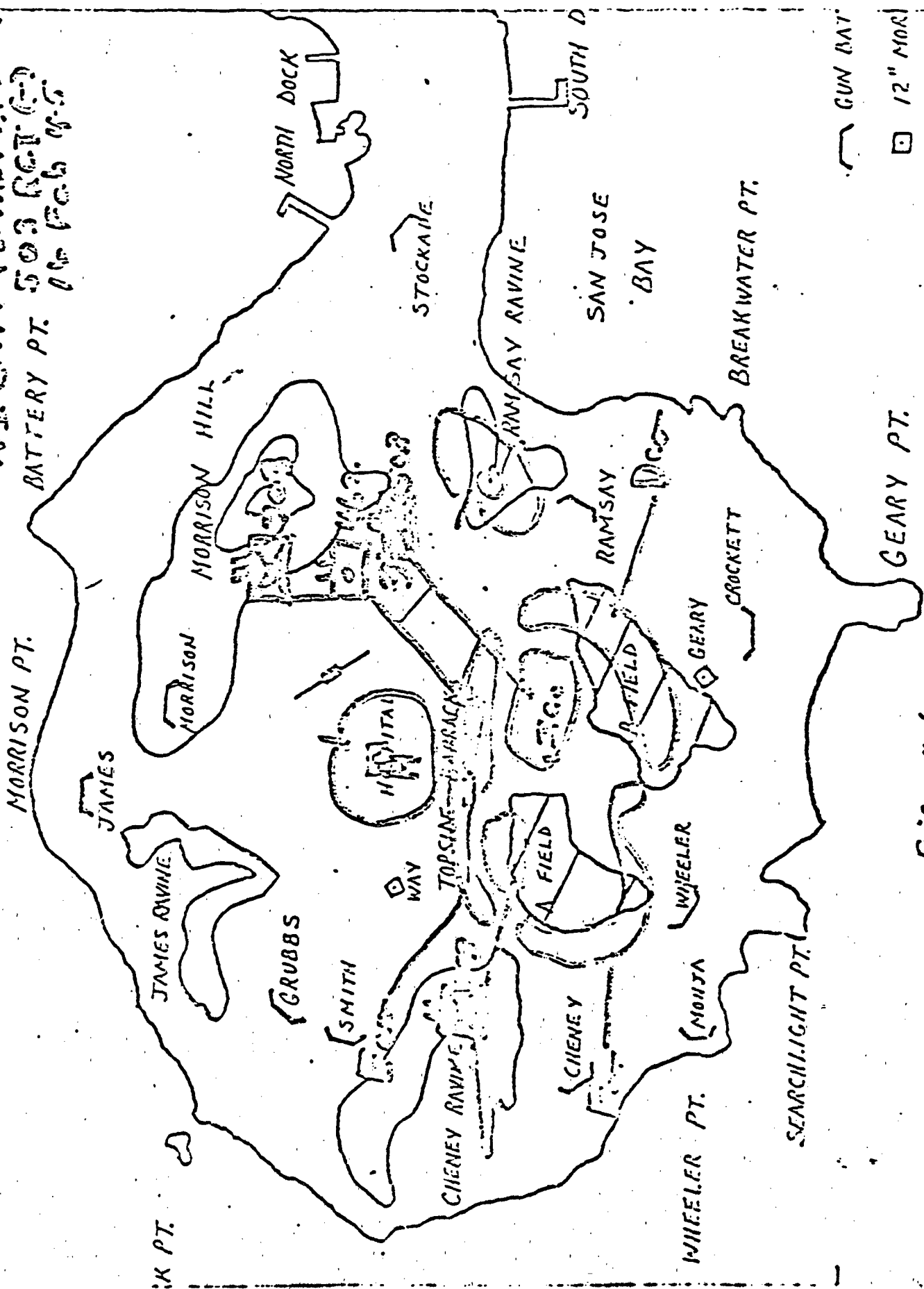


Fig 4-65

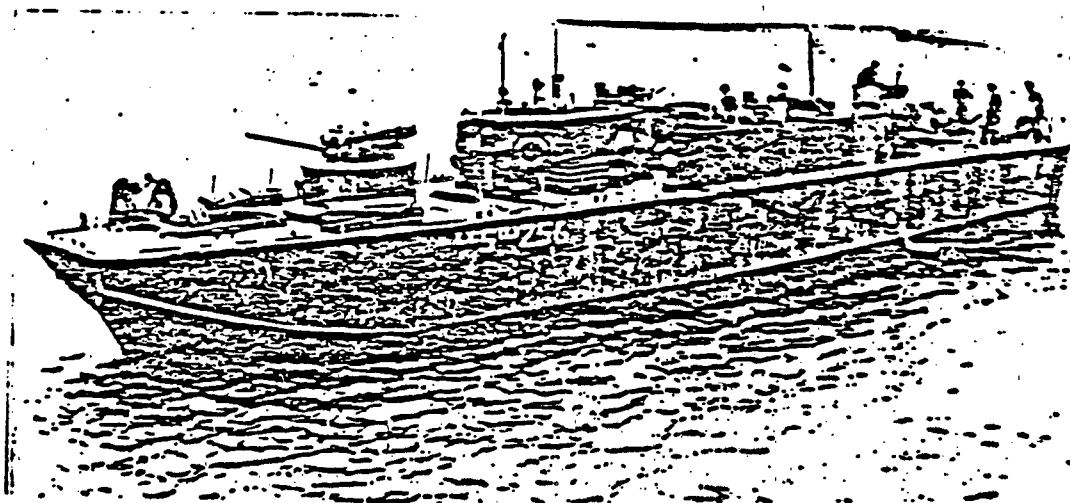
When the 503rd jumped, everybody jumped. In addition to the normal reinforcements such as the airborne, artillery, and engineers, there was a JASCO. The JASCO was really a communications team from a Joint Assault Signal Company. The JASCO provided ship to shore communication for both the 503rd and the 3/34 and performed as a naval liaison gunfire control party. This same source references a Nisei intelligence team being dropped in, but I found no official record of this. Other unusual jumpers on the first day included a signal corps team of combat photographers, an observer (LTC) for the Armed Forces Far East Board, and the regiment Red Cross representative. Mr. Templemen, the Red Cross representative, brought his coffee pot and was operating in support of the regimental hospital before dark on the 16th.

The 3rd Bn 34 Infantry (reinforced) was scheduled to assault into Black Beach. Black Beach was slightly east and south of the village of San Jose. The beach itself was only 230 yards wide and 10 yards deep. After this, terrain was a mixture of bomb craters, rubble buildings, cliffs, and hills. The 3/34 moved out from Mariveles Harbor early on the 16th. The distance from pick up to landing was twelve miles. The preparatory fires described earlier also included the 3/34's objective area. The Bn's mission for the 16th was to land on Black Beach, seize and hold Malinta Hill, secure an initial beachhead and be prepared to open and secure a ground route to the 503rd. Elements of TF 78 carried and protected the 3/34 for the three hour trip. TF 78 assigned 3 destroyers specifically to soften up the landing area. Twelve hundred rounds of 5"/38 were fired at the beach, cliffs, tunnels, Malinta Hill, and other positions surrounding the landing area. As the LCMs moved into the beach, a final preparation was fired by multiple rocket launchers on landing craft accompanying the waves. (See figure 4-7) Lastly, there were several specially equipped gun landing craft that supported the landing with direct fire from 3"/50 and 40mm. TF 78 OPLAN 4-45 and the 34th Regimental Combat Team after action report give an excellent account of the prior planning, the coordination, and the combat action.

The ground operation commenced when K and L companies of the 3/34 unloaded from the first wave of LCMs. The companies moved around San Jose to secure Malinta Hill. The resistance consisted of small arms and machine gunfire. The enemy was not yet organized or effective. The beach was mined, but the mines were clearly visible and the infantry just walked around them. I company landed to secure the initial beachhead, followed by H, M, and A companies. By the time the 4th and 5th waves were in range, the enemy fire had become significant. The landing craft were under fire by heavy machinegun, 20mm cannon and some artillery pieces thought to be 75mm or 3-inch. The fire on the beach itself became more intense and mortar rounds began falling. Despite the increasing Japanese fire, beach operations continued. As the troops moved out to eliminate the enemy positions, the gun landing ships and destroyers provided fire support. The worst casualties on the beach occurred as heavy equipment began to arrive and move toward the yet unmarked minefield. Within minutes a tank, truck, ambulance, jeep, 37mm cannon, and several soldiers were lost as they



LCI (RKT)



LCI (S)

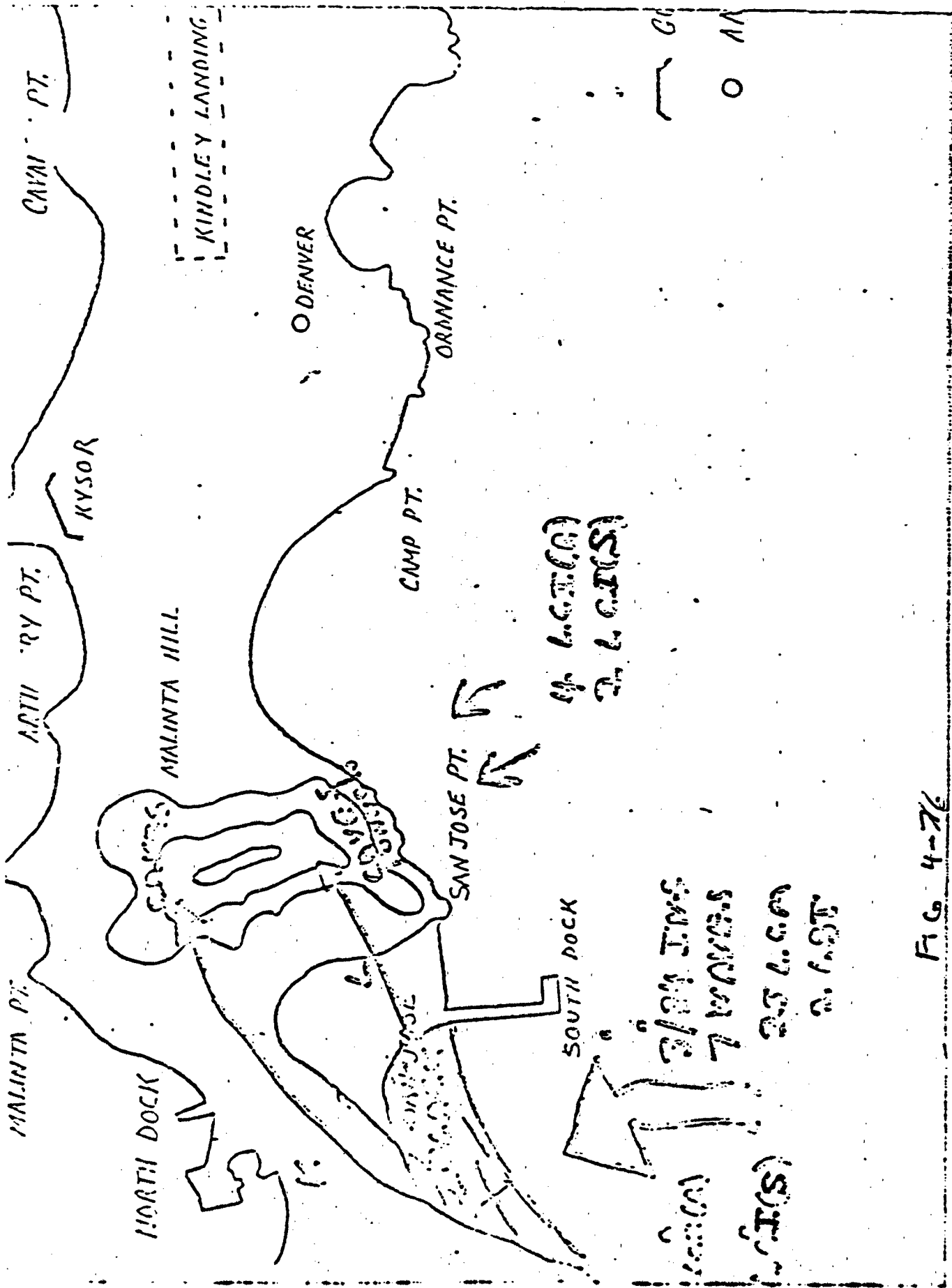


FIG 4-76

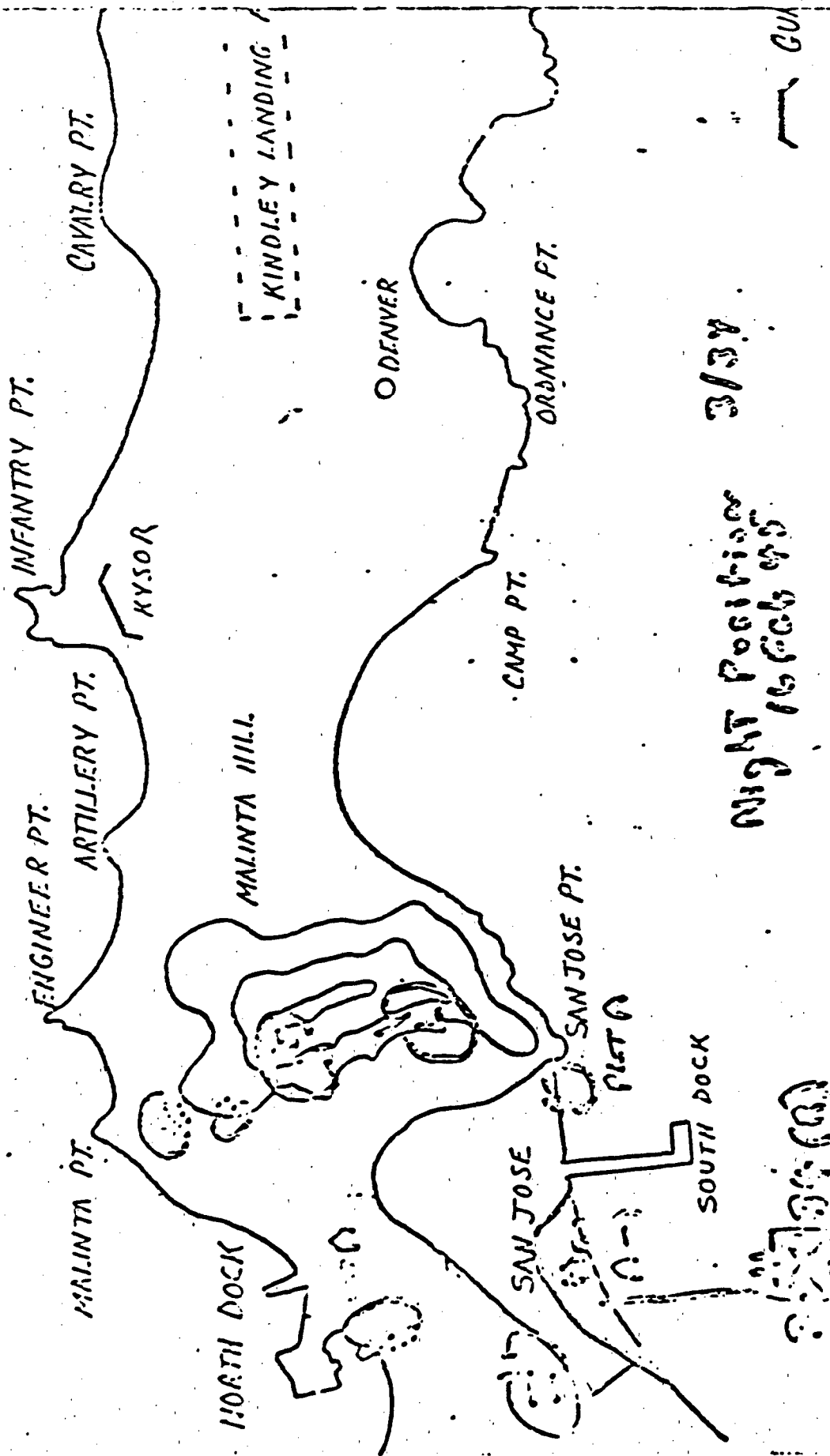


FIG 4-9r

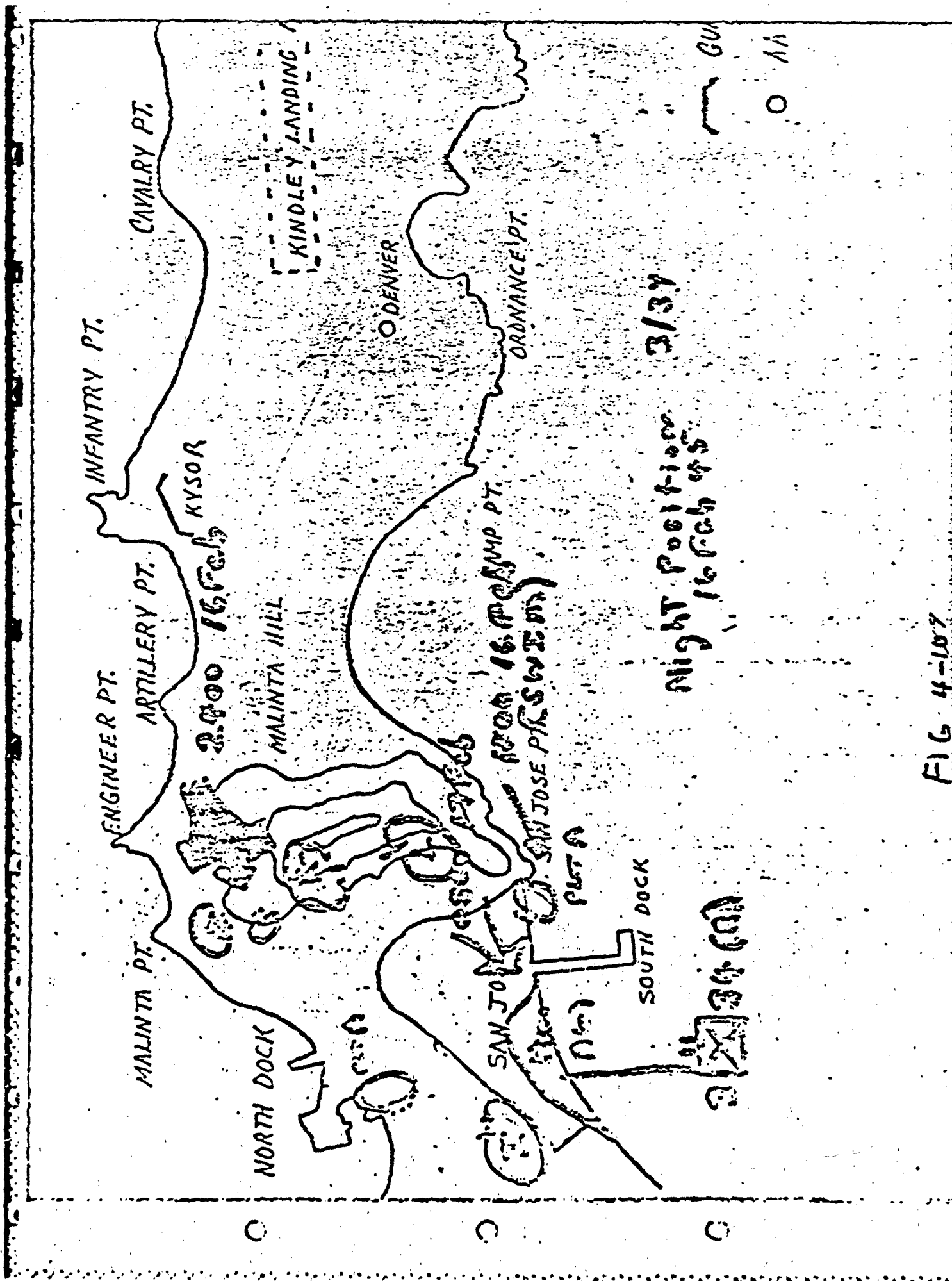
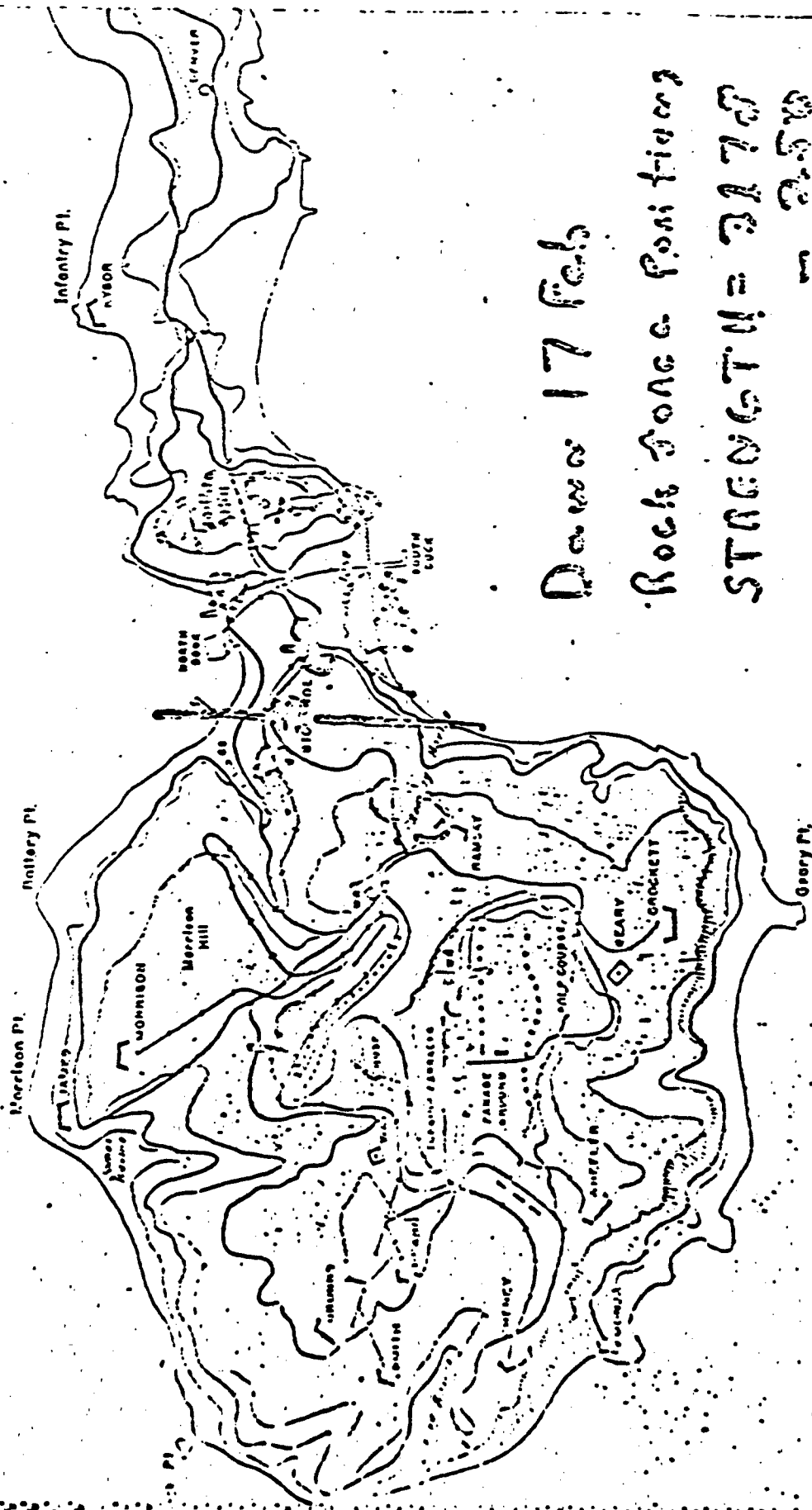


FIG 4-107



Data 17 Feb
 Rock Force Positions
 STRENGTH = 3170
 - 2500
620

FIG 4-4/c

CHAPTER FIVE

"ROCKFORCE" OPERATIONS 17 FEB-2 MAR 1945

17 February 1945:

At daybreak on 17 February a coordinated attack was launched against Morrison Hill by the 3d Bn, 503 Prcht Inf. 2d Bn, 503 Prcht Inf assaulted the Wheeler Battery area, a southern coastal gun position converted by the Japanese into a small fortress. Capture of the Wheeler Battery fort was not completed until late the next afternoon. Another essential area to be neutralized was the ravine on the east side of Morrison Hill just west of the North Dock in CORREGIDOR Bay.

The troops at the 3d Bn, 34 Inf. improved their positions astride the Malinta Hill area and were assigned the mission of containing the enemy to the east and protecting the beachhead.

On the morning of 17 February, at 0830 hours, the transports carrying the third and final lift of personnel and equipment, approached CORREGIDOR. Since the Rock Force commander's earlier request had been approved, only the equipment bundles were dropped; the planes proceeded on to the San Marcelino Airdrome. At 1630 on 17 February, the 1st Bn, 503d (reinf) arrived in San Jose Bay from Subic Bay in APDs. They were sent ashore in LCVPs. The battalion was moved ashore and established a perimeter on the high ground just east of San Jose beach during the night. On the following morning the battalion was moved "TOPSIDE" and a readjustment of boundaries was made. The west end of the island was divided into thirds and each battalion commander given the objective of clearing his sector.

The battalions were made up of roughly three rifle companies:

- a. 1st Bn, 503d had A, B and C companies
- b. 2d Bn, 503d had D, E and F companies
- c. 3d Bn, 503d had G, H and I companies.

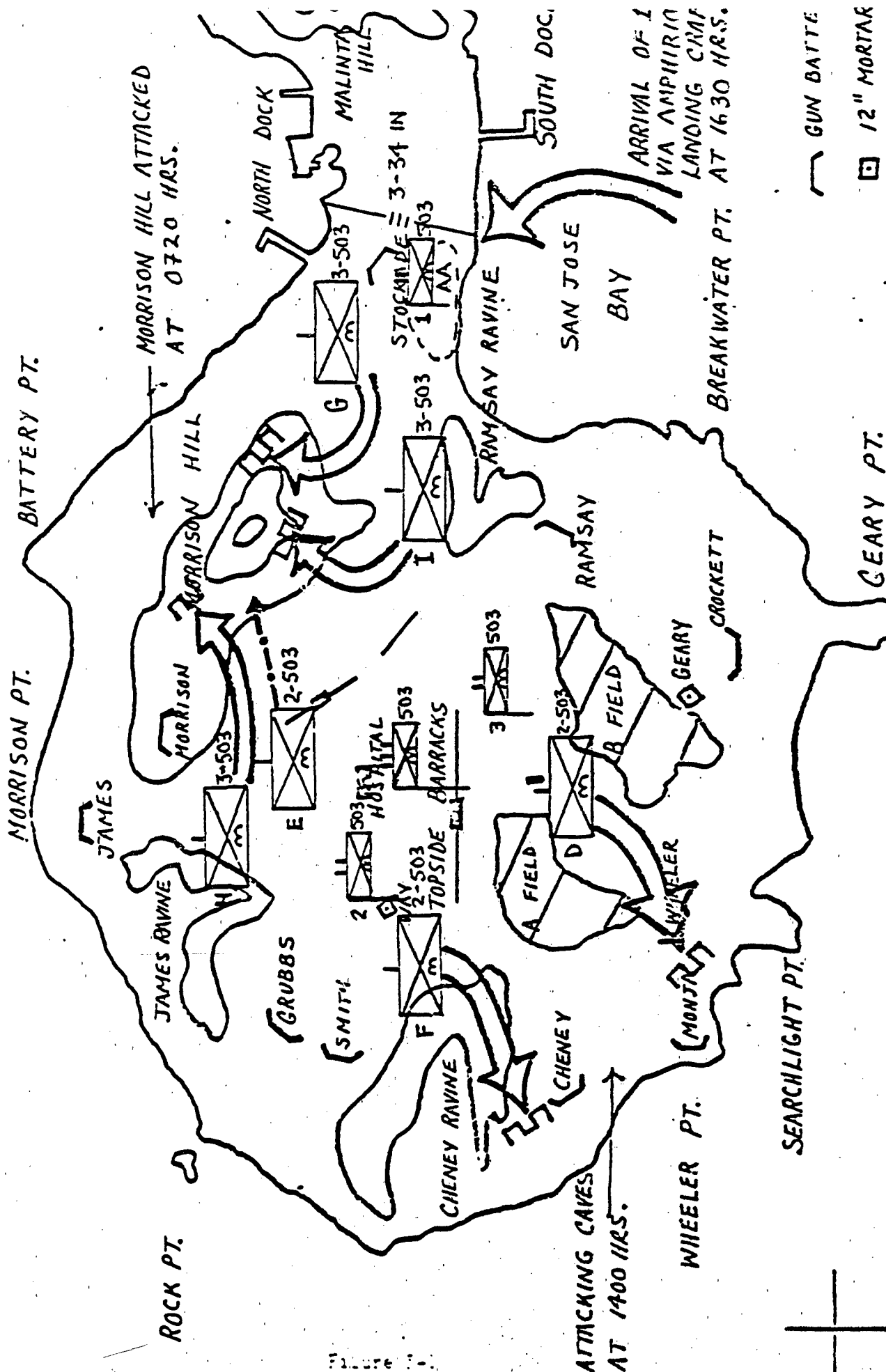
Additionally, the 503d RCT employed a battalion of air-droppable artillery (75-mm Howitzers). The artillery was used in the direct fire and indirect fire mode, supporting every ground operation during the following campaign. Naval gunfire and close air support aircraft were employed throughout the battle. Demolition teams, supported by HMG (Heavy Machine Gun) teams and flamethrower teams assisted the infantry in systematically clearing the tunnels and caves held by the large enemy force.

The stronger of the enemy emplacements during this period were HMG pillboxes, located 200 yards east of Battery Cheney, 300 yards NE of Battery Cheney, and 500 yards north of the hospital, which were knocked out after heavy fire fights. The daylight operations for all of the 17th was characterized by a systematic reduction of many enemy bunkers, pillboxes, and underground installations. The units of the 503d operating on "TOPSIDE" suffered 8 casualties during moderate to heavy fire from the enemy. Enemy casualties known to this date were 361 KIA and 0 POWs (of that total--196 were killed by 75-mm artillery fire).

Reserve forces for the 503d RCT were not mentioned specifically. The impression gained by the type of operations that were noted, was that combat patrols were sent out in a systematic search pattern to discover the strongpoints and then bring combat power from perimeter dispositions to counter the enemy. No special reserve force was then needed, each battalion would operate decentralized in execution of clearing a sector and maintain coordination with adjacent units and higher headquarters throughout their effort.

Resupply during this period was accomplished in several ways. Resupply of water, rations and ammunition started at 1300. Twelve hundred and fifty gallons of water in five gallon cans was air dropped with equipment chutes. Two days of K rations were dropped free fall, but due to the speed of the aircraft (C-47s) and the altitude some rations were badly damaged. Immediately after the drops, details were sent to collect the supplies and haul them to the RCT supply dump with a captured Japanese truck. Other supply hauling transportation arrived at 1600 from the beach which consisted of 2 jeeps w/trailers, loaded with five gallon cans of water. These assets were immediately put into service. A lot of captured material was found in former enemy emplacements, leading the 503d commander to believe that the Japanese had plenty of supplies pre-stocked on the island.

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



18 February 1945:

Systematic neutralizing of the enemy installations was begun. Enemy fire increased considerably during the day. Many of the installations that had been cleared on the previous days were found to be reoccupied and had to be attacked and reduced again. The enemy was very familiar with the terrain and had many underground interconnecting tunnels that he would use in the night in order to infiltrate back into the already attacked positions of the preceeding day. The 503d RCT would have reports from the battalion and company OPs stating that some small enemy units would be spotted during the night moving along the ravines and crevices to mask their movement. This type of enemy tactic was used throughout the occupation of the 503d RCT on CORREGIDOR. This tactic was even more effective in my mind, due to the fact that the battalions would generally tighten their perimeters at night, which normally occurred at official sunset, (1900 hours) during this period, and would give up some surrounding ground which they had secured during daylight operations. Of course, this was a necessity due to the many defiles and ravines, tunnels and unknown strongpoints throughout the area "TOPSIDE."

In the eastern sector (3-34th's area) a group of six enemy soldiers were observed in the SW entrance of Malinta tunnel attempting to bring into action a 75-mm gun. They were fired on and killed. Spasmodic machinegun fire from east of the Malinta Hill was directed at the perimeter defense around the entrance to the Malinta tunnel system. During the night enemy activity was observed immediately east of Malinta Hill. It was perceived by the commander of the 2d Bn, 34th Inf that the enemy may be consolidating for an attack against the 34th sector.

During the day's operations over 70 enemy were killed by organic artillery fires, some naval shelling by destroyers and cruisers off the NW and SE coast and considerably more killed by a coordinated patrolling effort and CAS. Total enemy KIA for this day 789, and 0 POWs taken thus far. Friendly casualties were noted to be 19.

Evacuation of wounded and dead began on this date. The 2 jeeps and trailers plus ambulances from the beach were used to transport wounded and dead. On the return trip the jeeps w/trailers would haul water, flamethrowers, communications equipment and rations from the beach. The 18th Portable Surgical Unit arrived from the beach and set up in a deserted building near the Regimental Combat Team headquarters. Requisitions for .45 cal and .50 cal ammunition was radioed to Mariveles. All the supplies drawn thus far were stored in the RCT supply dump and would be issued on as needed basis to subordinate units. Continuous air and sea resupply was being maintained and conducted throughout the campaign. Daily details would collect bundles from the DZs and bring them back to the RCT supply area.

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19 February 1945:

Commencing at 0200 hours and continuing thru 0845 hours a major coordinated enemy counter attack was initiated. Approximately 400 enemy troops (ENDO Marines) launched a "Banzi attack" against the 503d's perimeter and were successful in penetrating the 2d Bn's sector at some points. The enemy came dangerously near the 2d Bns CP and was finally repulsed after hours of heavy hand-to-hand fighting and bloodshed. The enemy gained some positions on "TOPSIDE," but in doing so sustained heavy casualties. Fortunately the enemy was stopped before he could consolidate his forces in a coordinated defense. However, the fiercest fighting on this day occurred in the 3d Bn's assault on Breakwater Point. Navy destroyers, firing broadside into the cliffs, supported this action which ended just prior to darkness (1902 hours).

At 0130 hours, the early morning hours of the 20th of February, a large enemy underground explosion occurred in the vicinity of Breakwater Point, causing casualties on both sides, exact number unknown. Estimated at least 40 enemy KIA, some due to initial explosion and some due to "Hari-Kari" with grenades held to their stomachs.

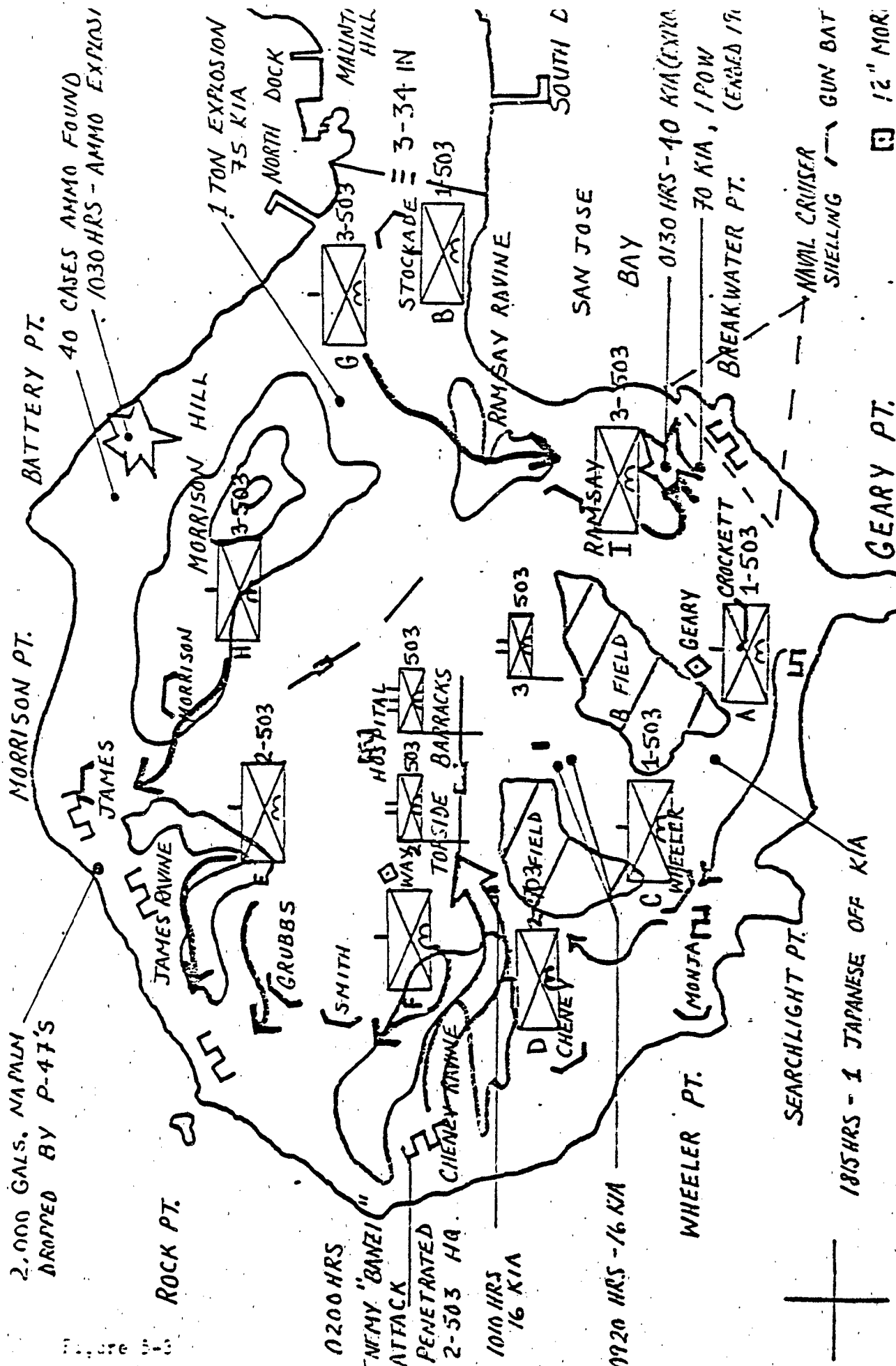
Strong enemy resistance and increased aggressive offensive attack began to show signs of a coordinated effort and maximum use of automatic weapons. During the night all points "TOPSIDE" reported enemy infiltration attempts along the perimeters. In the eastern sector, the exits of the Malinta tunnel would be covered by fire, during the day to prevent the enemy from exiting. The tunnel system was estimated to hold 1,000 - 2,000 Japanese soldiers and an unknown quantity of supplies and ammunition.

Enemy casualties on this day were estimated to be 493 KIA and 3 POWs. Of this number 126 were estimated to be killed by 75mm artillery rounds. Friendly casualties were considerably fewer with a number estimated to be 33 KIA and 75 WIA.

Continued collections of isolated air resupply bundles and equipment from DZs was ongoing. All types of supplies were hauled and stored in RCT supply dump. Captured Japanese equipment was crated and readied for shipment to XI Corps headquarters. Evacuation continued of dead and wounded. Message sent by radio to XI Corps headquarters as to disposition of captured materiel.

19 FEB 1945

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



20 February 1945:

On 20 February, 53 caves and tunnels were sealed in the Breakwater Point area alone. The enemy continued his strong and now organized resistance to becoming ejected from his remaining strongpoints and underground installations throughout the western sector. During this period the intensity of the fighting on the western half of CORREGIDOR continued to be very heavy. Rock and Wheeler Points were the scenes of some of the bloodiest fighting. In both of these sectors close support was given to the infantry forces by Navy cruisers and destroyers, but the northern channel had been infested with controlled mines. This made the infantry rely on close air support by the fighter bombers of the Fifth Air Force. Such support was not uncommon throughout the campaign, P-47s with mixed munitions of napalm, 500 pound bombs, and .50 caliber ammunition would pound the enemy incessantly until the guns of the foe were quieted. In addition, naval guns, late that afternoon, sealed the main entrance of the Malinto tunnel, by causing a landslide which sealed off the eastern side. It was presumed by many observers, that the landslide was caused by secondary explosions of the high tonnage of explosives stored in the tunnel.

Enemy activity and regrouping continued throughout the night. Attempts at perimeter infiltration and other attacks failed. In the eastern sector, futile attempts were made by the Japanese, to break out of the friendly force perimeter with little success.

Enemy casualties during this period amounted to 255 KIA and 0 POWs. Organic artillery fires resulted in only 1 KIA, confirmed this day. This was true, because most of the fires on this day were interdiction fires and not observed direct and indirect fires. Friendly casualties none reported.

Organized salvage parties were sent out to collect all equipment lost on the jump and to retrieve that equipment that belonged to the wounded and dead that had been collected at the aid stations. This equipment was integrated into the normal stocks and issued as needed. A requisition was sent to Mariveles for Red Cross supplies, demolition equipment and fruit juices for hospital patients.

20 FEB 1945

CORREGIDOR ISLAND

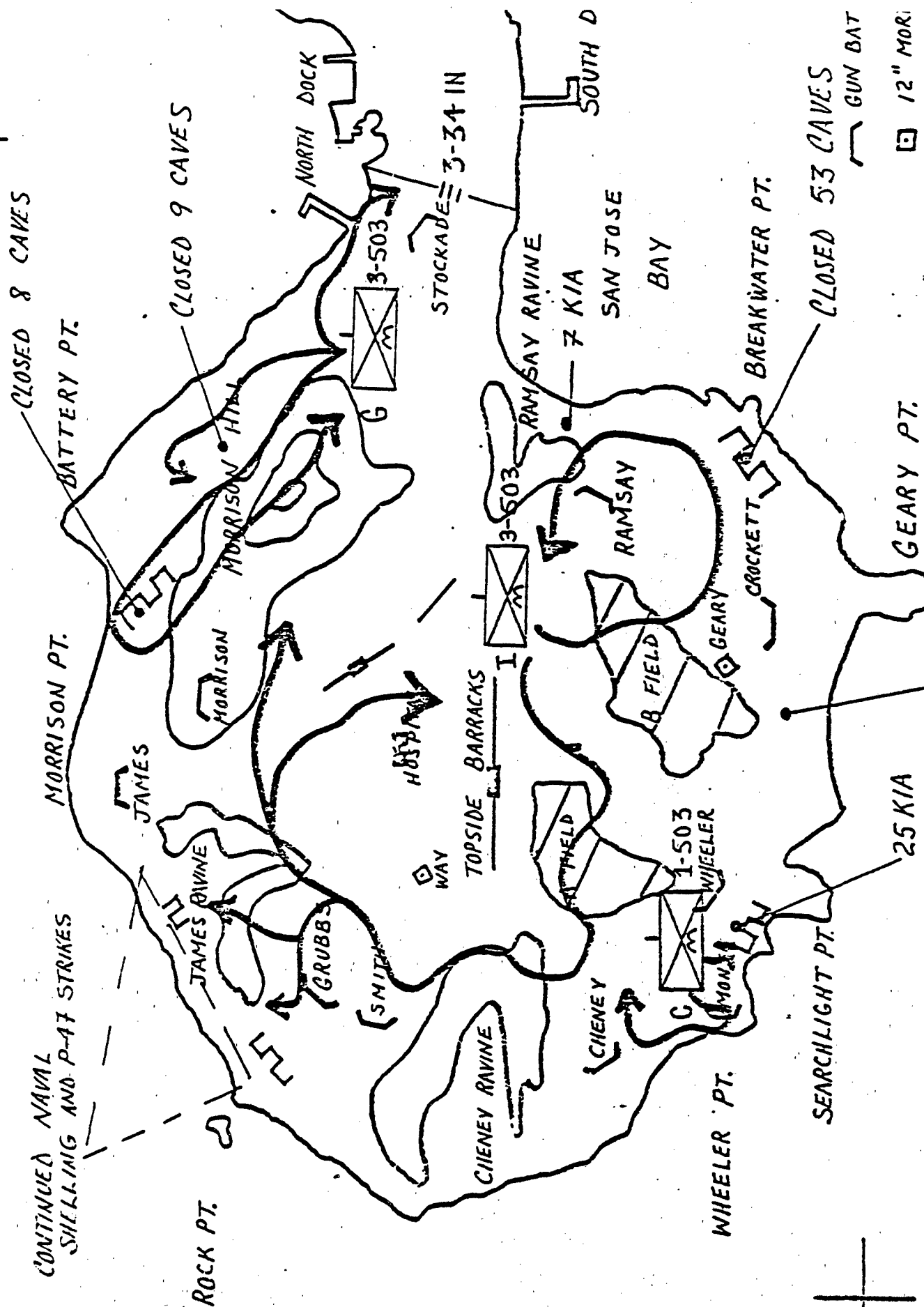


Figure 3-4

21 February 1945:

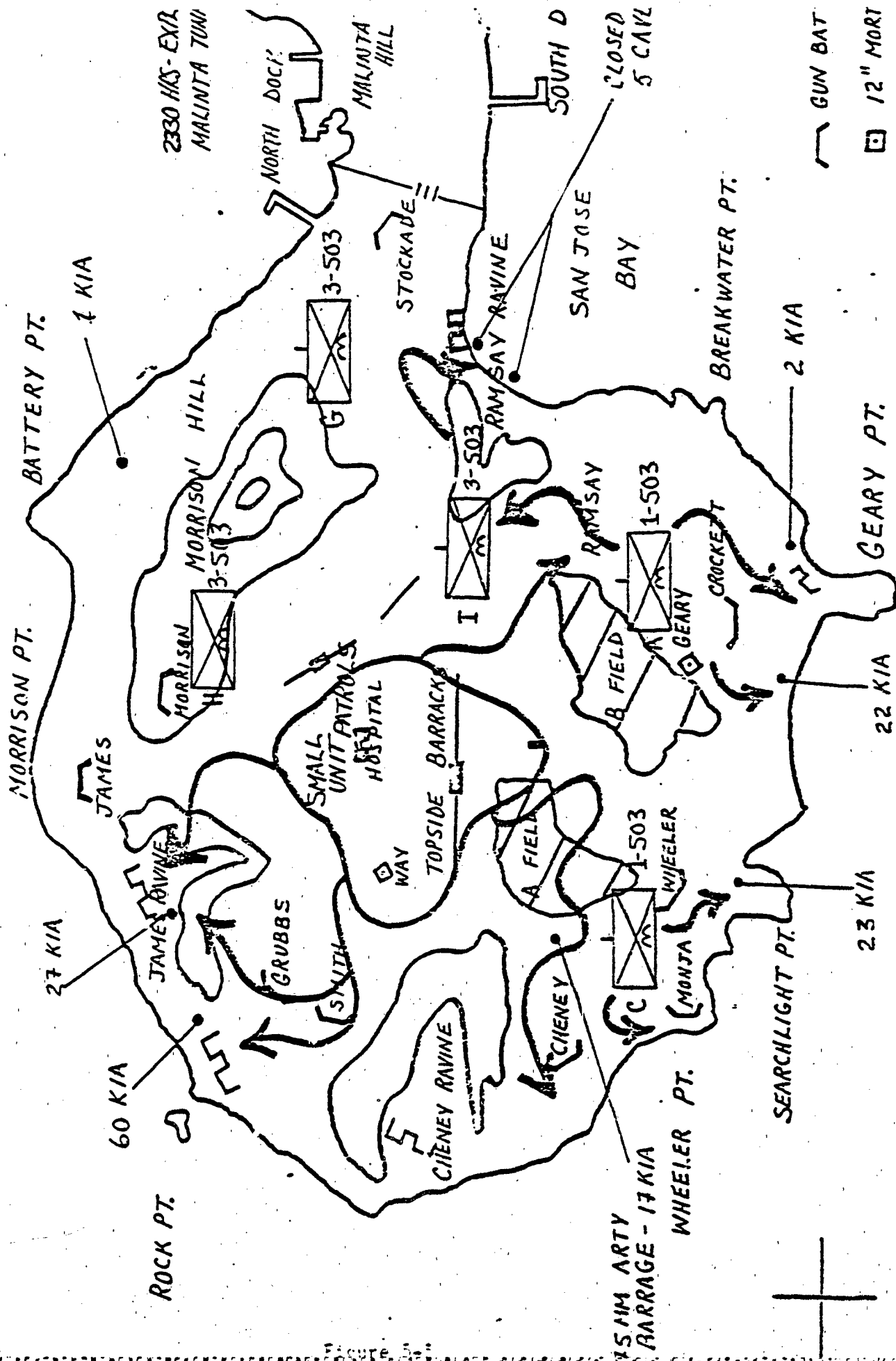
On this day the final preparatory and "softening up" fires were being continued on the far eastern portion of the island of CORREGIDOR. This process was being conducted by naval gunfire off the coast and by CAS sorties of fighter bombers and B-24 bomber aircraft. It was the prelude to the combined attack from Malinta Hill to the east by two battalions of the 503d RCT planned to kick off of the 24th.

Enemy continued to resist vigorously against the continuing systematic eliminations on the island. During the night, however, OPs reported a decrease in the nightly enemy activity in the western sector. In the eastern sector, the enemy activity and harrassing fire from the east decreased noticeably during the day. During the night at approximately 2330 hours, an explosion occurred inside the Malinta tunnel. Flames poured from all tunnel entrances and there were landslides and casualties on both sides, but Malinta Hill still survived. This explosion, it was found out later, was to be a controlled diversionary tactic in order to free enemy from the tunnel to the east. Of course that was not the way in which it occurred and many Japanese were killed, but still hundreds of Japanese escaped to the east as planned during the confusion. (Approximately 600)

Enemy killed this day amounted to 362 KIA and 0 POWs. Enemy killed by organic 75-mm artillery was estimated at 14. Most casualties this day were caused by the Malinta tunnel explosion and subsequent escape attempt in which 50 more Japanese were killed. Friendly casualties 6 KIA.

One 1,250-gallon Navy cube had been set up for storage of water. All the supplies requested had been shipped from the supply point at Mariveles on the Bataan Peninsula. Two bulldozers and a road scraper were brought up from the beach to clear roads and construct an L-4 (liaison plane) strip in front of the RCT headquarters. Other supply functions continued as previously described.

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



22 February 45:

During the period of 22 February, the enemy situation did not change appreciably, in either sector. Resistance was still heavy to moderate when enemy positions were attacked by the 503d's systematic approach of clearing the intricate cave and tunnel systems. The major note made this day was that the enemy that were killed, showed all indications of being well-fed and supplied.

Enemy killed during this period were relatively light in comparison to earlier conflicts. Twenty-three were killed by 75-mm artillery fire and a total of 119 KIA with the capturing of 1 POW. Of the 11 serviceable howitzers in operation from the 462d FA Bn, most of the rounds fired during that day were fired in the interdiction role. As a matter of note, interdiction fires were scheduled all during the night, normally during this period nine rounds were fired per hour from 1930 hours to 0700 hours nightly, by C Btry. The 462d FA Bn was composed of three firing batteries with:

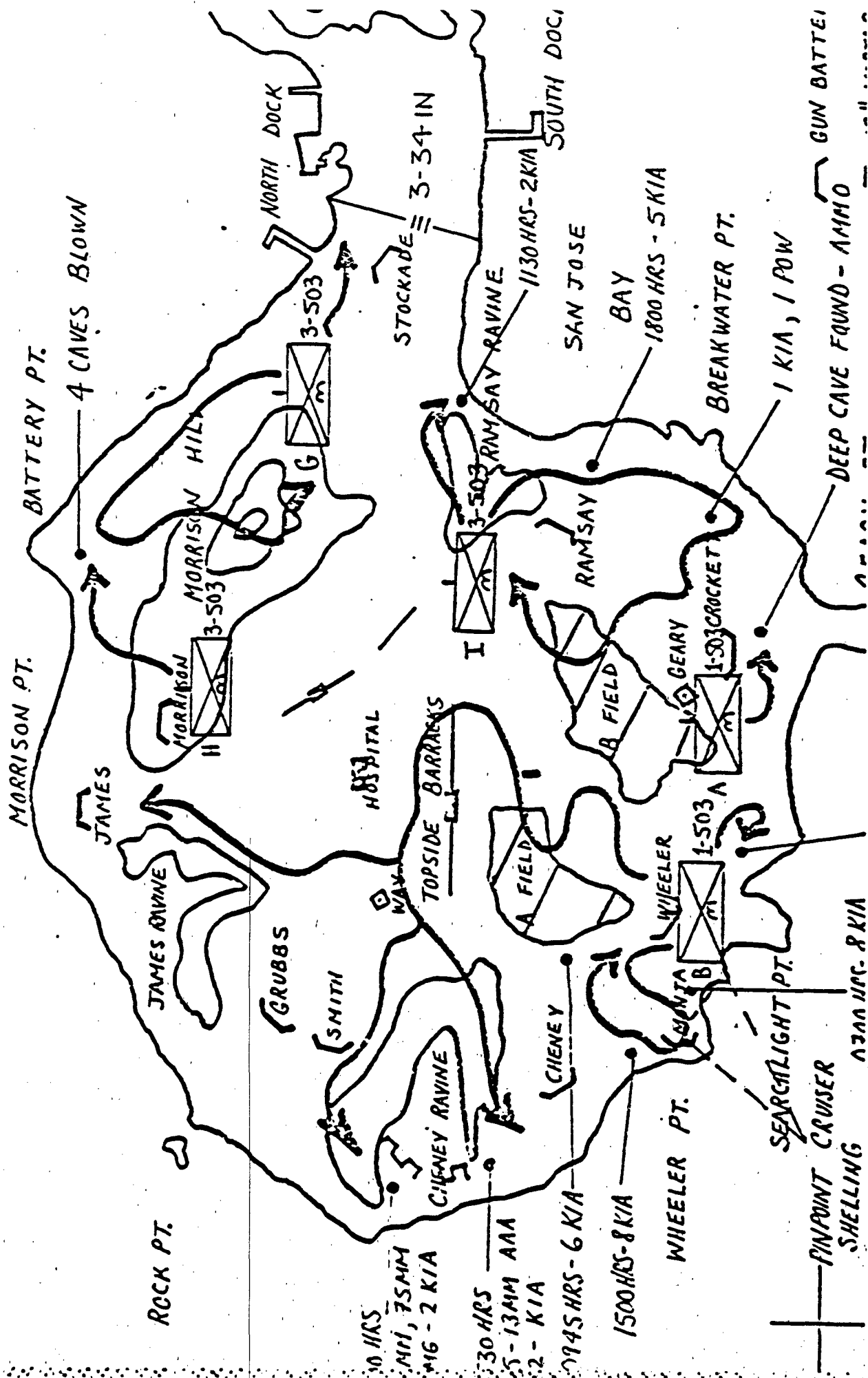
- a. A Btry having 3-75mms
- b. B Btry with 4-75mms
- c. C Btry with 4-75mms operational.
- d. D Btry was the HMG Btry, composed of 24 .50 caliber machineguns of which 19 were usable on the 18th of February.

These weapons were tasked out to the infantry units, to augment their perimeter firepower.

On the 22d of February, the artillery batteries started massing in the vicinity of the "parade ground" for the purpose of supporting the planned RCT assault east from Malinta Hill on the morning of the 24th.

Work had been completed on the L-4 (liaison aircraft) strip. The first aircraft landed at 1000. Bulldozers were put to work clearing lines of communication and to reduce refuse and debris that was causing an unsanitary condition. Requisition was radioed to Mariveles for sand bags, DDT insecticide and sprayers. The dead Japanese bodies were in the state of severe decay and the flies were menacing. Two days supply of "10 in 1" rations were received and placed in RCT supply dump. A request was sent to the C.O. rear base, A.P.O. 321 to drop 2,700 parachute type coveralls on the 23d. Mail was received by aerial delivery on this date.

CORREGIDOR ISLAND



23 February 1945:

At 0430 the enemy assaulted the 503d RCT's perimeter with an estimated 400 troops, again in a desperate attempt to penetrate the defenses and gain the high ground in the vicinity of Wheeler Point. This attack was also repulsed, as was their first attempt on 19 February. The enemy withdrew and the systematic reduction of enemy position continued.

By 23 February, the western half of CORREGIDOR was sufficiently cleared up so that plans could focus on the upcoming attack. Troops were moved to assembly areas and the battalion commanders with some of their staff officers moved to high ground (Malinta Hill) in order to gain valuable intelligence on the terrain on which they were to fight on the next morning.

During this first week, and prior to the assault that was planned to the east, over 2,466 enemy soldiers were confirmed KIA and 6 POWs were captured. Many more enemy were most likely buried in the labyrinth of caves, sealed shut forever. Several POWs recounted that there were over 6,000 enemy troops on CORREGIDOR when the assault was initiated, of which at least 500 were in the Malinta tunnel. Friendly casualties remained relatively low. (Approximately 118 KIA and 314 WIA)

At 0830, the resupply of coveralls by free drop started. After the drop was completed, all coveralls were loaded on trucks and hauled to the RCT supply dump. A radio (SCR 300) was installed in the supply dump office with a direct channel to supply point at Mariveles. Water ration was increased to 4 quarts per man per day and 1,000 hand grenades and rocket launcher ammunition arrived from Mariveles. It was noted that supply functions were running relatively well up to this point in the campaign.

24 February 1945:

On 24 February, the attack went as planned, with elements of the 3d Bn, 34th Infantry taking the high ground in the vicinity of Engineer Point. During this phase of the battle, 19 suicide "Q" boats, 15' long, 4' wide and constructed of plywood, were captured. The boats were powered by a four cylinder gasoline engine and would contain high explosives in order to destroy oncoming landing craft during amphibious landings.

Heavy MG fire and mortar fire was encountered by the 1st Bn, 503d RCT as it passed through the 3d Bn, 34th Inf, and began their advance to the east. The units of the 503d moved into positions east of Malinta Hill and pushed forward under a massing enemy that occupied the road 300 yards south of Infantry Point. The enemy's strength was approximately 600 strong. The strongest opposition was encountered between Engineer and Infantry Points, where the enemy launched a "Banzai Counterattack" against the oncoming friendly forces. The artillery units that were massed prior to the attack, pounded enemy positions causing many casualties. Tanks and infantry repulsed the attack by 2300 hours.

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This attack took its toll on the enemy once again. Over 704 were killed by the coordinated efforts of the 1st and 3d battalions of the 503d RCT. Meanwhile, the western sector was being held by the elements of the 2d Bn, 503d RCT, still meeting with light to moderate resistance. In all sectors artillery, air and navy support was indispensable and gave the friendly troops an edge over the Japanese troops. Still the enemy was able to maintain stiff resistance against efforts of clearing them in the Wheeler Point area.

Receipt by air of radio batteries (BA43s and BA70s) was the highlight of the resupply for the 24th. Continued salvage effort on the DZs was continued.

The 3d Bn, 34th Inf (Reinf) was relieved in place by elements of the 1st Bn, 151st Inf and were moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of the South Dock for movement back to Mariveles.

25 February--2 March 1945:

In the morning the attack was continued and by the end of the day of 25 February, the front lines extended along a north-south line from Cavalry point to Monkey point. Very heavy resistance was encountered at Monkey Point.

Concurrent with the assault of the two battalions of the 503d to the east, quite a few enemy attempted to reach Bataan shores by utilizing anything they could. Using makeshift rafts, logs and by swimming, they tried to escape the island to no avail. Due to the fact that enemy soldiers carried weapons with them during this attempt, friendly ships, aircraft and artillery units were to engage and kill many soldiers before they could get ashore.

The resumption of the drive east on the 26th of February by the 1st and 3d battalions was met by suicidal actions similar to the incidents at Malinta Hill. The enemy exploded an underground arsenal in the vicinity of Monkey Point killing many of their soldiers and some of ours, who had just taken the high ground. The underground explosion was so severe that a 35-ton Sherman tank tumbled end over end nearly 50 feet, killing all but one of the crew. The friendly casualties were estimated at 196. In spite of this action, the 1st Bn, 503d was able to secure the commanding terrain by 1600 hours the same day. Again this task was made possible due to the pinpoint accuracy of the guns and artillery being used in the assault. For the first time in the campaign, air support was not used due to the proximity of friendly troops throughout the length of the island.

Over 500 more dead Japanese were accounted for by the end of the day's action of the 26th, and two more POWs were taken. This increased the total KIA to 4,215 and a total of 18 POWs taken. Friendly casualty rate was still relatively low.

The final 503d RCT assault was made on 27 February. The 1st Bn, 503d Infantry was returned to an assembly area on "TOPSIDE" and the 3d Bn assumed the responsibility for the eastern sector of the island. By the end of this day--organized resistance was broken and only small pockets of enemy were noted to be operating. Against 4,506 counted enemy dead, Jone's forces had only taken 21 POWs. An estimated 500 more were sealed in caves and another 200 killed or drown in the water, trying to swim to Bataan.

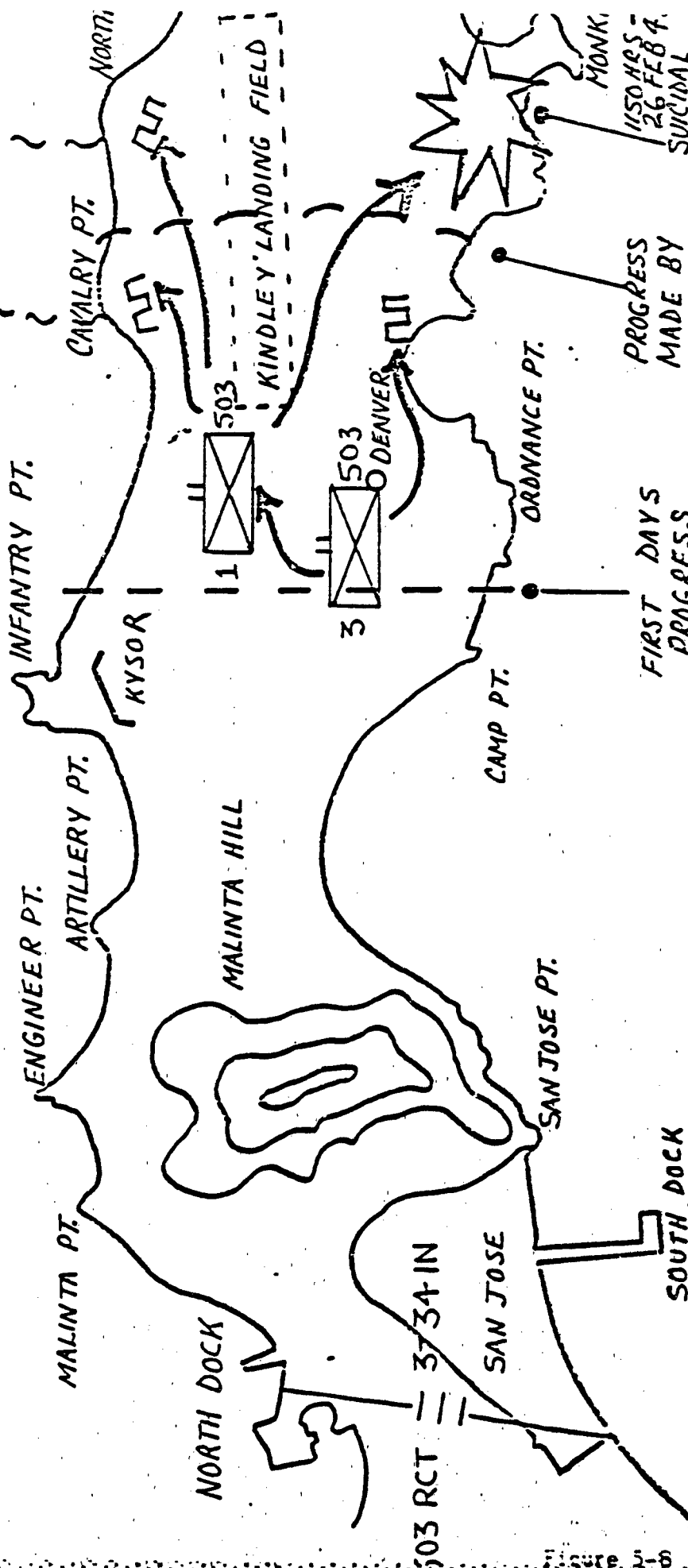
From the 27th of February to the 2d of March 1945, remaining enemy pockets were located along the waterline caves, Wheeler, Engineer, Infantry and Cavalry Points.

Logistics support of the period from 27 February to 2 March was focused mainly on refitting and resupplying shortages that were identified by the regimental battalions, as the units were staging for movement home, to Mindoro. Coveralls were issued to personnel participating in the ceremony that was to be conducted on 2 March. The 2nd of March 1945 was spent readying for the arrival of General MacArthur. The campaign was officially closed as of 2400, 2 March 1945. Colonel Jones' "Rock Force," paratroopers and infantry, had suffered a total of 210 KIA and 450 WIA, during this intense battle for the "Rock," CORREGIDOR Island.

25-26 FEB 1945

CORREGIDOR ISLAND

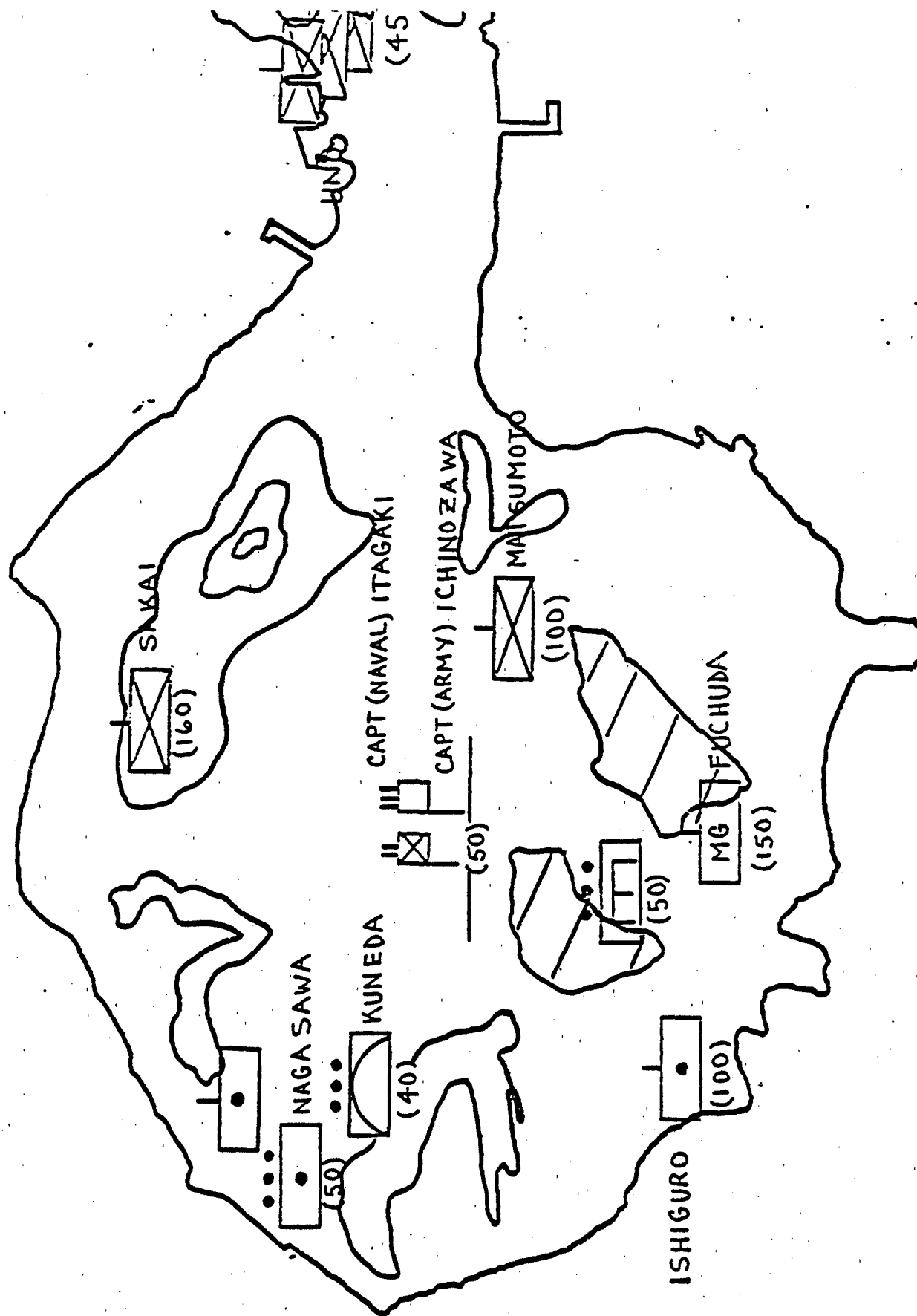
SOME MY TRIP
TO SUMMIT OF CORREGIDOR
TO BATMAN



* BY 1600 HRS - 26 FEB 1945,
EASTERN PORTION OF CORREGIDOR
ISLAND SECURED BY 503D

O AA BATT

IMPERIAL ARMY POSITIONS



CHAPTER SIX

THE KEY EVENTS AND THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE OF CORREGIDOR

I. KEY EVENTS OF THE BATTLE

The key events in the battle of CORREGIDOR are not recognizable and distinct turning points in the battle. Events such as the repulse of an unexpected counterattack or the successful execution of a deliberate attack did occur, but none were significant enough to give a decisive victory to either of the opposing forces. The events key to the US success in the battle are subtle and subjective.

KEY EVENTS

The Destruction of the Command and Control Capabilities of the Japanese Defense Forces on CORREGIDOR:

The pre-invasion US naval gunfire and air bombardment which proceeded the airborne and amphibious landings destroyed much of the wire communications between the prepared Japanese defensive positions located in the ravines and caves on the perimeter of CORREGIDOR. The seizure and destruction of the Japanese command post by paratroopers from the 3d Bn, 503d RCT completed the destruction of the communications network. The death of Captain Akira Itagaki, the commander of the Japanese defense forces eliminated the command and control of the defense forces.

The Division of the Japanese Forces Located on the West and East Portions of CORREGIDOR:

The success of the 3d Bn, 34th Infantry's amphibious assault allowed them to rapidly consolidate their beachhead and move to seize Malinta Hill. The control of Malinta Hill physically divided the island and the Japanese forces. Since the enemy had positioned reserve forces on and in Malinta Hill, its seizure eliminated the use of the reserve as an effective counterattack force. The division of the forces facilitated offensive actions to destroy the Japanese forces.

The Linkup of the 3d Bn, 34th Infantry with the 503d RCT:

The linkup of the airborne force with ground forces is a critical element in achieving success in operations using airborne forces. Physical contact was made by patrols from the 3d Bn, 503d RCT and the 3d Bn, 34th Infantry on 16 February. The first ground resupply of the airborne force and the evacuation of their casualties through the 34th Infantry beachhead was accomplished on 17 February. The early establishment of the communication and logistic support lines between the airborne and ground forces accelerated the tactical operations to destroy the enemy forces.

It is clear from the operational plan developed for the invasion of CORREGIDOR that the US forces anticipated the key events of the battle. Pre-invasion bombardment objectives included the disruption and destruction of the Japanese communications network. Although the early destruction of the Japanese command post and the death of the Japanese commander were partially a matter of luck, they should be considered benefits of airborne operations. The division of the Japanese forces and the linkup of the airborne force with the amphibious force were key to the success of the US operations plan.

Since the Japanese command structure perished during the battle there are no detailed Japanese after action accounts of their actions during the battle. Conclusions about the Japanese anticipation of the key events of the battle and their reactions to the events are drawn from accounts of the Japanese defensive preparations before the battle and the actual conduct of the battle.

The Japanese defense plan did not anticipate an airborne envelopment. Captain Itagaki had been directed by Yamashita to prepare the anti-airborne defense of the island. After conducting a reconnaissance of the island he concluded that no airborne attack could take place on the island. In partial fulfillment of Yamashita's guidance and as a hedge against an airborne attack, he had the old landing strip on the south end of the island mined and covered by fire. His defense of the island was based on the premise that the US forces could not successfully conduct an airborne attack. He concluded the attack would come from the sea.

The beaches located on the north and south sides of the tail of CORREGIDOR were best suited and most likely areas for amphibious assault. This area includes the north and south dock areas of San Jose. The Japanese had conducted their 1942 amphibious assault on the north side of the tail. The extensive Japanese mining of these beaches, the location of the large force at Malinta Hill and the positioning of the Maru 4 suicide boats in the vicinity of the beaches indicates that Captain Itagaki anticipated that the amphibious force would strike one or both of these locations in an effort to establish a beachhead and in turn divide the island and his forces. The stationing of a large force in and on Malinta Hill indicates that Captain Itagaki intended to counterattack the amphibious assault and preserve the physical continuity of his defense.

Why the Japanese failed to initiate an effective counterattack against the amphibious force is not clear. The effective naval gunfire which sealed many defenders in Malinta Tunnel, the surprise and success of the airborne assault, and the destruction of the command and control of the defense all contributed to the Japanese failure to react to the amphibious assault. For whatever reason, the failure to counterattack the amphibious assault insured the division of the island and its defenses.

The linkup between the airborne force and the amphibious force was accomplished without substantial Japanese resistance. The Japanese failure to prevent the linkup of the forces parallels their failure to prevent the division of the island. They initiated no coordinated effort to prevent the linkup. The single difference between the two failures is the fact that Captain Itagaki did not anticipate the airborne assault and the required linkup with the amphibious force. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that he did not plan for any defense mechanism to defeat the linkup of the "Rockforce."

The failure of the Japanese forces to counter the anticipated amphibious assault and the unexpected airborne envelopment were to some extent the negative effects of the early destruction of the command and control apparatus.

The command and control apparatus of the Japanese defenses reflected Itagaki's amphibious attack premise. The wire communications network was constructed to support the command and control of a perimeter defense from a central command post located inside the perimeter. The wire lines were run directly from defensive positions to the Japanese command post on TOPSIDE. No lateral wire lines were laid between the defensive positions. With no redundancy built into the wire network, the destruction of the lines severed communications between the defensive positions and the command post. Captain Itagaki probably assumed that if the wire lines were destroyed, he could use messengers or personally go to critical locations to control the battle himself.

Captain Itagaki's actions on the morning of 16 February substantiates this assumption. During his personal reconnaissance to observe the assembly of landing craft off Mariveles, he was killed by a group of paratroopers that missed their drop zone during the initial airborne assault on TOPSIDE. Had Itagaki anticipated the airborne assault, he probably would have designed his communication system accordingly and located his command post somewhere other than adjacent to the probable drop zone. That he anticipated the untimeliness of his death is unknown.

The key events of the battle favored the "Rockforce" and enabled the US forces to take advantage of the inherent weakness of the Japanese defense plan. Japanese historical accounts of the battle reconstructed after World War II, indicate that the destruction of the communications network, the death of Captain Itagaki, and the unexpected airborne assault in conjunction with the amphibious assault prevented any coordinated defense of CORREGIDOR. The divided and leaderless forces were forced to fight a losing battle as independent groups from isolated and widely separated strong points. Their efforts had little influence on the key events of the battle. The capacity to take advantage of the key events clearly belonged to the "Rockforce."

II. THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE

In the battle of CORREGIDOR, the "Rockforce" obtained a clear tactical victory for the United States. It secured its tactical objectives and accomplished its mission to destroy the enemy forces on CORREGIDOR. The battle was fought in accordance with Colonel Jones' plan. The cancellation of the third serial of paratroopers on 16 February was the only notable change to the operations plan.

The "Rockforce" combined excellent leadership, efficient organization, and battle tested tactics with experienced and well-trained soldiers to defeat the Japanese forces. High morale, very effective combat support, responsive combat service support and a little self-generated luck were also instrumental in the "Rockforce" success.

The "Rockforce" was organized for the type of combat that was necessary to defeat the Japanese forces on CORREGIDOR. It was a tailored combined arms team capable of independent action. Its tactics were adapted to the nature of the Japanese defenses. The individual small unit operations during the battle were primarily aimed at drawing the Japanese from their hiding places so that they could be destroyed without undue danger to the US forces.

A specific example of the adaptive US tactics was the evening withdrawal of US forces from selected and previously captured Japanese defensive positions. The Japanese would reoccupy the positions during the night and at dawn would find themselves targets of registered artillery fire and accurate direct fire from individual and crew served weapons. After the destruction of all the enemy in a specific area, the perimeter of the "Rockforce" was expanded to include the neutralized terrain.

The training of the "Rockforce" was excellent and was reinforced by extensive battlefield experience. The 3d RCT had trained and fought together for three years. The 34th Infantry was also a well-trained and battle-tested force. Both forces had previously been involved in operations together. Both units were familiar with the air and naval forces supporting them. The 317th Carrier Group had airlifted the 3d RCT for two years. The 34th Infantry had previously been supported by the 7th Amphibious Force.

The excellence of training and the extensive battlefield experience molded the units of the "Rockforce" into cohesive fighting forces with high morale. Their high level of morale enabled them to conduct an extremely difficult fight against an enemy whose acts of self-immolation often resulted in the untimely and sometime bizzare deaths for "Rockforce" soldiers.

The leadership of the "Rockforce" gave the US a clear advantage in the battle. Outstanding command and staff work enabled the "Rockforce" to enter battle with a detailed plan which was flexible enough to permit rapid change to meet any situation. The extensive reconnaissance conducted by the commanders of the subordinate elements of the "Rockforce" is testimony to the professional competence of the leadership. Once on the ground, timely decisions were made by commanders at all levels. Leadership by example was the rule and the list of "Rockforce" casualties gives testimony to the moral courage of its leaders.

A superficial examination of the battle would indicate that the "Rockforce's" success was due to an inordinate amount of luck. That an airborne force violated the principle of maximum force on the ground in a minimum of time and was still successful seems to substantiate such an observation. Detailed analysis of the battle indicates otherwise. Conscious risks taken by the "Rockforce" resulted in the complete surprise of the enemy. Much of what appears to be luck on the part of "Rockforce" was generated by the element of surprise. It was the element of surprise, not sheer luck that enabled the "Rockforce" to violate principles of mass and conduct a successful operation on CORREGIDOR.

The combat support provided the "Rockforce" was key to its success. US service support elements provided logistic support by both sea and air. Service support elements stockpiled "Rockforce" equipment and supplies prior to the actual attack of the island. Logistic packages were arranged on a "push" basis. Rations, ammunition and water were key items in the packages. Initial resupply of the airborne forces was conducted from the air. Within thirty-six hours of the initial paratroop landings on TOPSIDE, the airborne forces were receiving supplies and equipment through the 34th Infantry's beachhead. Unanticipated "Rockforce" logistic requirements were filled by air resupply.

Care and evacuation of wounded "Rockforce" soldiers was very effective. The "Rockforce" regimental medical aid station was in operation shortly after the initial airborne assault. Casualties were treated by regimental medical personnel until the logistics link with the beachhead was established. Vehicles used to transport supplies from the beachhead were used to move casualties from TOPSIDE to the beachhead. The 18th Portable Surgical Unit, operating initially from the beachhead and later from TOPSIDE, treated and evacuated casualties to naval support ships.

The Japanese failed in their mission to defend the island from capture. The failure of the Japanese forces to defend the island in accordance with Captain Itagaki's plan is clear. The Japanese forces suffered from ineffective leadership, adhoc organization and attrition tactics. Although numerically superior to the "Rockforce", Japanese personnel were for the most part unsuited for ground combat.

The organization and the tactics of the Japanese forces on CORREGIDOR insured their defeat. The defense force, consisting of various different types of naval and army units, was an adhoc organization. Most of the naval units were not suited for ground combat. The Army forces were organized on a provisional basis. Many of the units were below strength and had been partially filled by survivors from decimated units and sunk ships.

The tactics the Japanese used in the defense of the island were similar to those used in the previous island fighting in the Pacific. The uncoordinated suicide attacks and the destruction of several of the tunnels on the island are examples of Japanese offensive tactics. The resistance to the death of small isolated groups and individuals typified Japanese defensive efforts. The use of individual snipers against the US forces proved to be the most effective Japanese tactic. The tactics were not aimed at achieving victory. Rather they were aimed at attriting the enemy as much as possible before he inevitably destroyed you. By their nature, the Japanese tactics insured their eventual defeat.

The training and experience of the Japanese forces was generally poor. Official Japanese records indicate that there was very little confidence in the ability of the naval units for ground combat. With the exception of elements of the Japanese Special Naval Forces and the provisional Army battalion on the island, the defense force on CORREGIDOR was not trained for or experienced in ground combat. There is little documentation with regard to the specific readiness of the Japanese defense forces. The adhoc nature of the defense force organization probably retarded any development of unit cohesion.

The commitment of the individual Japanese soldier to the traditional philosophy of self-immolation was great and may to some extent have offset the lack of unit cohesion. Japanese leaders encouraged self-immolation by example. The mass suicide attacks, the self-destruction in the island tunnels and the few Japanese survivors of the battle give testimony to the psychological strength of the Japanese. The extent to which the acts of self-immolation negatively or positively effected the conduct of the Japanese defense at CORREGIDOR is not clear.

In contrast to the US leadership, the Japanese leadership entered the battle with a plan that did not acknowledge the enemy's capabilities. The outcome of the battle indicates that the Japanese leadership may not have had the technical or tactical competence necessary to conduct successful defensive operations. The lack of detailed Japanese after action reports makes it difficult to assess the true tactical and technical competence of the Japanese leadership.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CORREGIDOR

Impact of the Battle

Although the airborne assault on CORREGIDOR stands out as one of the most daring operations of World War II, and the overall battle of the "Rock" stands as an outstanding example of effective joint operations, the results of the battle bore little tactical or strategic impact on the outcome of the war in the Pacific.

The strategic location of the "Rock" may have given it control over the entrance to Manila Harbor had its coastal artillery defenses been operational, but in fact, naval operations had been safely conducted in Manila Bay for two weeks prior to the assault on the island. By the time the 503rd PCT actually mounted their airborne operation, aerial and naval bombardments had destroyed or damaged all but one piece of this vital Japanese coastal artillery. So although the Japanese forces on CORREGIDOR may have been capable of harassing naval operations in Manila Bay, they did not have the capability to seriously threaten them. Therefore the ground battle merely seized dominating terrain that has already been rendered relatively harmless by naval and aerial bombardment.

To the Japanese the loss of CORREGIDOR could hardly be called significant. The Japanese High Command had already consciously written off CORREGIDOR and the entire Philippines when Leyte fell. Upon making their decision to concentrate their defenses of the home island farther to the north, the entire defense of the Philippines could more or less be viewed as a delaying operation designed to trade space for time. Even the main defenses on Luzon were concentrated in the rugged mountainous regions far from the entrance to Manila Bay in an attempt to tie up as many of MacArthur's forces as possible. Had the Japanese placed a greater value on the retention of the "Rock," one would have to assume that command of the defense forces would not have been relegated to a senior staff officer and the defensive forces assigned to repel the American landings would have consisted of more experienced, better organized combat troops than those who fought and died during the fifteen (15) day battle.

In reality, it appears that the real underlying motive for the assault on CORREGIDOR may have been psychological. CORREGIDOR and the Philippines were very emotional issues. Ever since General MacArthur had been ordered to withdraw from the Philippines early in the war and leave its defense and ultimate defeat in the hands of General Wainwright, he had promised to return in victory. CORREGIDOR had been the last bastion of American defense in the Philippines, and the general American public sought vengeance for what they perceived as an ignoble, shameful humiliation that was only intensified

by the suffering forced on its gallant defenders during the Eataan Death March. While CORREGIDOR stood as a symbol of American defiance and gallantry, public opinion also saw it as a symbol of the cruelty and inhumanity of the Japanese occupation forces. That CORREGIDOR be stormed and retaken from the Japanese seemed only righteous by prevailing standards and a sop to the ego of General MacArthur.

Lessons Learned

Aside from the sentimental aspects of retaking CORREGIDOR, the entire operation stands out as a classic example of joint service operations. At a time in the war when the principal American efforts were focused on the 3rd Marine Division on Iwo Jima, the cleanup of Luzon, and B-29 strikes aimed at the Japanese homeland, the CORREGIDOR operation seems to have been conducted almost as an afterthought. Yet the effectiveness and speed with which the battle was planned and completed stands as a tribute to ground, air, and naval force planning and execution, particularly when the size of the enemy force and his dispositions are considered. Much of the credit for the effectiveness of this joint operation can be attributed to the familiarity that the players had with each other. That the 317th Troop Carrier Group had worked with the 503rd PCT at Cairns and in combat jump operations at Nazab (Sep 43) and Noemfoer Island (July 44), and that Task Force 78.3 also had a long history of combat operations associated with the 34th Infantry Regiment speaks strongly for forming habitual relationships between combat forces. Everyone involved has a mutual understanding of the problems they faced, and having worked out liaison and coordination problems during previous operations, knew how to solve them together. In fact, by this stage of the war each element had so much joint combat experience that the assault on CORREGIDOR was simply viewed as just another operation. Each service participant seemed to approach this risky, complicated operation with an attitude that confidently said, "Oh by the way, next week we are going to conduct a joint airborne/amphibious assault on CORREGIDOR." For example, the smooth transition that the 3-34 Infantry made from the Mariveles operation to the amphibious assault on CORREGIDOR bears mute testament to the matter of fact approach with which such a potentially complicated operation was undertaken.

Perhaps one of the most significant results of the airborne assault on "TOPSIDE" was the impact it had on the traditional, accepted airborne doctrine of the day. At a time when doctrine dictated that parachute delivered troops could only be safely inserted by rapidly massing paratroopers on large, relatively obstacle-free drop zones, the airborne assault on CORREGIDOR showed that a relatively obstacle-free drop zones, the airborne assault on CORREGIDOR showed that a relatively small number of really determined, well-trained parachutists, backed up by aerial firepower and delivered into a totally unexpected target area could achieve results all out of proportion to their strength. Despite the fact that on "TOPSIDE" the drop zones were inadequate by accepted standards, were situated right on top of the enemy, and that the landing period for each battalion took hours instead of minutes, the success achieved by the 503d Infantry exceeded every expectation despite its complete departure from established doctrine.

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Although the principle of mass was violated, the 503d PCT had done so knowing that the surprise achieved by such an audacious, unorthodox insertion, although risking defeat in detail, would probably carry the day and catch the Japanese defenders totally unprepared to meet it. "TOPSIDE" therefore not only reinforced the value of vertical assault to achieve surprise over a numerically superior enemy, but also demonstrated that orthodoxy and inflexibility have no place in airborne combat and that it is no more amenable to rigid principles or rules than warfare in general. Like all other tactical doctrine, airborne doctrine and principles must be applied with common sense, and the methods of attack must be adapted to the peculiarities of the defense.

The success achieved by the surprise insertion of paratroopers on "TOPSIDE" also strongly reinforces the value of tactical surprise as a principle of war. By attacking the enemy's weakness in a method that he considered totally improbable, the 503d PCT was able to seal the fate of the island fortress by gaining the dominant terrain and denying the enemy the capability to command and control his forces. In this situation, surprise was one of the most significant factors that enabled the "Rockforce" to defeat a numerically superior enemy force.

Captain Itagaki's decision to base his defense on something that he felt an attacker couldn't or wouldn't do also bears some close scrutiny because history is full of commanders who have made the same fatal mistake. Captain Itagaki's defense was based on conservative Japanese military doctrine; but had he studied his American opponents and become familiar with their military doctrine, he may not have been so eager to eliminate the airborne option. Commanders like Erwin Rommel who have studied their opponents and have learned to think like them have proven far more successful than those who simply rely on their own military doctrine and concepts. The ability to think like one's enemy enables a commander to consider and plan for all contingencies; had Captain Itagaki seriously considered an airborne assault on TOPSIDE even a remote possibility, a contingency plan involving a strategically placed reserve would have had catastrophic results on the airborne forces.

US air superiority also played a major role in the battle. CORREGIDOR stands as a shining example of the absolute necessity of maintaining air superiority in an operation of this type. Air was not only the medium that allowed the airborne force to safely reconnoiter and vertically envelope the island, but it also provided the opportunity for a successful drop by denying Japanese forces access to the drop zones by effectively keeping them safely "hold up" in their caves and tunnels. This same air superiority also enabled the "Rockforce" to virtually operate without fear of enemy air attack or naval reinforcement and provided a reliable method of initial logistical resupply.

The use of intelligence by the "Rockforce" was also noteworthy and enabled the US planners to effectively come up with a viable plan that struck at the enemy's weakness. By combining readily available information about CORREGIDOR's existing defenses with the experience gained through numerous island campaigns, the planners perceived that Japanese tactical doctrine left them vulnerable to a vertical assault. This basic tenet, when combined with Captain Itagaki's conservative Japanese military thought that considered only the obvious and eliminated the unusual or that which they would not do themselves, spelled out the ultimate defeat of the CORREGIDOR Defense Force.

At the same time that intelligence was the driving force behind the initial insertion plan, the basic failure of American intelligence to correctly assess enemy strength on CORREGIDOR fortunately did not effect the outcome of the battle. However, had only an amphibious operation been undertaken in isolation without the combined airborne assault, the results would have probably been far different because the numerically superior Japanese forces were totally prepared for an amphibious assault. Therefore in this situation, intelligence inadequacies may have brought about catastrophic results had the Japanese been able to bring the full weight of their forces on the amphibious landing.

Pathfinders were available for the TOPSIDE Operation, but a conscious decision was made to use an airborne platform to control the jump instead of the conventional pathfinder team on the ground. This proved to be a mistake. Even with Colonel Jones making drop corrections from the plane piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Lackey, the impact point for a full eighty percent (80%) of the paratroopers who didn't drift over the cliffs was still approximately one hundred meters (100m) off of both drop zones. Had pathfinder teams been used to control the operation, the pathfinders could have used their anemometers to make adjustments for each aircraft pass based on the drop zone wind strength and direction. This may have resulted in fewer jump injuries and lost equipment.

It is also significant to note that the contempt that the "Rockforce" seemed to hold for their Japanese counterparts acted as a motivator and made it much easier for the average soldier to take another human being's life without a second thought. The sentimental value of the "Rock" has already been discussed, but when this was combined with the hatred that the average American felt for the Japanese, the result was a significant combat multiplier.

This contempt and hatred for the Japanese appears to have been nurtured through a psychological operations campaign that produced a racist attitude throughout American society. Japanese were viewed as racially inferior beings. They were pictured as an extremely short race with buck teeth and glasses as thick as the bottoms of Coca Cola bottles, and their different

cultural values and standards were viewed as barbaric and unethical by an America who didn't take the time to try to understand its adversary. This whole attitude made it much easier to kill someone who was viewed as not quite being up to human standards.

In summary many of the "lessons learned" from the Battle for CORREGIDOR are as applicable today as they were then:

a) Habitual relationships should be established and maintained between combat and combat support forces. Such relationships create a mutual understanding between operational forces and facilitate operational planning and execution.

b) Military doctrine and the laws of war should only serve as guidelines and should be adapted to fit the peculiarities of each situation.

c) The tactical surprise gained by attacking an adversary in an unexpected manner is a significant combat multiplier that can enable the attacker to defeat a numerically superior enemy.

d) Commanders should study their enemies and learn to think like them. This enables them to consider all likely enemy courses of action and base their actions on all possible contingencies.

e) Accurate current intelligence can enable military forces to attack an enemy's weakness, but incomplete or inaccurate intelligence forces a commander to gamble with his maneuver forces and may eventually lead to their destruction.

f) Airborne operations require positive ground control for accurate insertion of parachute assault forces.

g) Racism and hatred of an enemy motivates combat forces and acts as a combat multiplier.

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